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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

A MERCURY PUBLICATION

Charlie Won't Be Home Tonight — CORNELL WOOLRICH
All the Way to the Moon — Q. PATRICK
Traveling Light — W. R. BURNETT
Flowers for an Angel — NIGEL MORLAND
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AN ANTHOLOGY OF THE BEST DETECTIVE STORIES, NEW AND OLD

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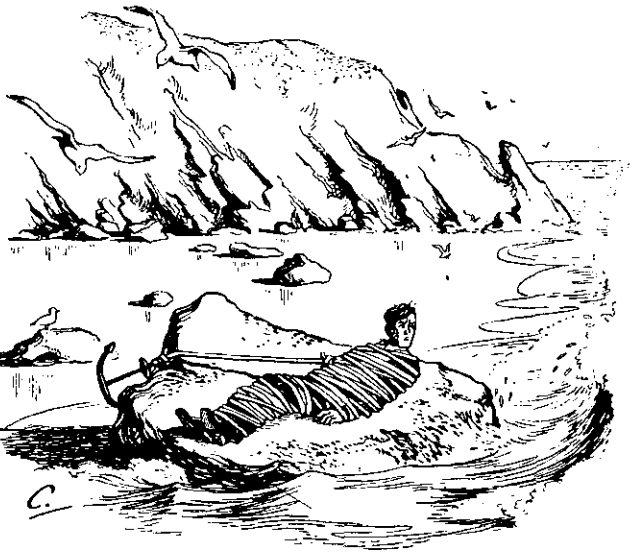
GET HIM OUT OF THIS

by ERNEST DUDLEY

The Problem of the Desolate Rock



With the Problem of the Desolate Rock, we bring you the third in the series of puzzles involving Snip Carton, insurance investigator. In the drawing at the right, he is about to meet a particularly unpleasant death unless he—or you—can devise an inspired method of escape. Below is a brief summary of how Snip Carton came to find himself in such a pass and of the perils he must overcome.

Snip Carton, insurance agent, flies to France to investigate a sensational swindle, which has, for the first time, broken the bank at exotic Monte Carlo. Night after night Snip Carton circles the wheels studying the gamblers, and soon puts the finger on the swindler—none other than Rene Vaplus, notorious French criminal. Vaplus escapes, but fearless Snip Carton tracks him to a house in the Rue Lette. Too late Snip Carton realizes it is a trap, for the vengeful Vaplus and a henchman sap him, carry him down to the beach and dump him in a dinghy. With the dawn, the two criminals row the unconscious Snip Carton to a barnacle-covered rock in the middle of a small bay. Between this rock and the towering cliffs sixty yards away is nothing but a series of smaller rocks surrounded by deadly quicksand. Vaplus and his helper bind the anchor rope around Snip Carton from head to toe, finally wedging the anchor in a crevice in the rock. They leave their hated enemy just as the scorching sun comes up, and the tide—with its treacherous currents—begins to rise.

So there's Snip Carton again facing death—this time by thirst, drowning or quicksand—unless you *GET HIM OUT OF THIS!* You will find Mr. Dudley's solution on page 24.

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

SUSPENSE STORY

CHARLIE WON'T BE HOME TONIGHT — *Cornell Woolrich* 3

DETECTIVE STORIES

Mrs. Pym in
FLOWERS FOR AN ANGEL — *Nigel Morland* 25

Dr. Colin Starr in
THE CASE OF THE PECULIAR PRECAUTIONS — *Rufus King* 49

Barnabas Hildreth in
O TIME, IN YOUR FLIGHT — *Vincent Cornier* 65

Professor Poggioli in
THE MYSTERY OF ANDORUS ENTERPRISES — *T. S. Stribling* 105

CRIME STORIES

TRAVELING LIGHT — *W. R. Burnett* 37
L'AFFAIRE ANTOINE — *Pierre Boileau* 95
ALL THE WAY TO THE MOON — *Q. Patrick* 130

AULD LANG SYNE DEPARTMENT

THE SHAKESPEARE TITLE-PAGE MYSTERY — *Carolyn Wells* 70

ROGUE'S GALLERY

THE SPY — *Rafael Sabatini* 81

BEDTIME STORY

MR. LOVEDAY'S LITTLE OUTING — *Evelyn Waugh* 124

BOOK REVIEWS

DETECTIVE DIRECTORY — *Robert P. Mills* 120

PUBLISHER: *Lawrence E. Spivak* EDITOR: *Ellery Queen*

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, Vol. 18, No. 94, SEPT. 1951. Published monthly by Mercury Publications, Inc., at 35¢ a copy. Annual subscription $4.00 in U.S.A. and possessions, Canada and the Pan American Union; $5.00 in all other countries. Publication office, Concord, N. H. Editorial and General offices, 570 Lexington Ave., New York 22, N. Y. Entered as second class matter at the post office at Concord, N. H. under the act of March 3, 1879.

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Cover photograph by Sid Rosenbaum

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

Invites you to enter its Seventh

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(again with the cooperation of Little, Brown & Co., of Boston)

First Prize $2,000
Award of Merit $1,000

3 ADDITIONAL PRIZES TOTALING $3,000

Conditions of the Contest

1. Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine offers a cash award of $2,000 as First Prize for the best original detective or crime short story. In addition, EQMM will award the following: one (1) Award of Merit of $1,000; four (4) Second Prizes of $500 each, and four (4) Third Prizes of $250 each. All prizes cover first American and Canadian publication rights in Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, subject to the provisions of paragraph 7. Other acceptable stories will be purchased at EQMM's regular rates. It is understood that, while authors retain all radio and television rights, there will be no radio or television use of stories bought through this contest until the stories have been published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine.

2. Preferably, stories should not exceed 10,000 words.

3. Awards will be made solely on the basis of merit — that is, quality of writing and originality of plot. The contest is open to everyone except employees of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, Mercury Publications, Inc., and their families. Stories are solicited from amateur as well as professional writers; from beginners as well as old-timers. All will have an equal chance to win the prizes.

4. The judges who will make the final decision in the contest will be Ellery Queen and the editorial staff of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine.

5. All entries must be received at the office of the magazine, 570 Lexington Avenue, New York 22, N. Y., not later than October 20, 1951.

6. Prize winners will be announced and the prizes awarded by December 31, 1951. The prize-winning stories will appear in Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine during 1952.

7. All prize winners and all other contestants whose stories are purchased agree to grant Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine book-anthology rights, and when these rights are exercised, they will be paid for as follows: $35 for the original edition, $25 for reprint editions, $25 for British book anthology rights, and a pro rata share of 25% of the royalties if the anthology should be chosen by a book club. Authors of all stories bought through this contest agree to sell non-exclusive foreign rights for $35 per story.

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How did Cornell Woolrich happen to become a writer? . . . The cause was an old sneaker — an old soft-soled canvas gym-shoe. Strange, isn't it? Tall tales from little gym-shoes grow . . . The sneaker rubbed one of Mr. Woolrich's heels raw. Because of the resultant infection, Cornell had to keep his foot up on a chair for about six weeks. By the time he started walking again, he had a lapful of scrawled yellow paper, and he had acquired a habit — the writing habit (for which addiction there is no known cure). The scrawlings, so painfully achieved, came out the next season as a full-blown novel. Then an editor wired Cornell, asking for a short story, and before the year was ended, Cornell Woolrich was a full-fledged professional author . . .

CHARLIE WON'T BE HOME TONIGHT

by CORNELL WOOLRICH

THE blasts were clearly audible on the quiet night air as the squad car tore down Central Avenue. It sounded like some other car backfiring in the distance, but it wasn't.

"Sounds like they're hot after him this time, the way it's keeping up," Keene said hopefully, but even as he spoke the gunfire petered out. *Bop!* One last lonely little shot sounded, trailing after all the others, then it echoed away into silence.

Keene balled a fist, brought it down convulsively on the top of the seat before him. "Don't tell me we're too late again!"

The man next to him didn't — he didn't have to. The scene that met their eyes as they skidded around the corner on two wheels into an adjoining side-street spoke for itself.

Light from an all-night cigar store cut a pale yellow swathe across the sidewalk, glinting with fragments of broken glass. Bullets from the recent fusillade had brought down a segment of its plate-glass front. A cop was coming slowly back toward the store, capless, his gait erratic, holding tightly onto his sleeve just below the elbow.

"So he got away, did he?" Keene said wrathfully before he was even out of the car. "What's the matter with you men, anyway!"

"Sorry, Cap, I couldn't do much accurate aiming with this." The cop took his hand away from his sleeve and a thin line of blood ran down the back of his hand, to the tip of his middle finger, rounded into a drop and fell to the sidewalk.

"Get it looked after," grunted Keene curtly, by way of grudging exoneration. "First blood," he added,

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half under his breath. "Who was it, our friend again?"

"Yes, sir. Left-handed shooter."

"That's him, all right. He's been making monkeys out of us for five weeks straight now."

"Why always cigar stores?" asked one of the men with him.

Keene shrugged. "Only one man to a store, as a rule, late at night. Less chance of being identified than if he tackled a bar or night-club."

He went inside the place, followed by his two subordinate dicks. The drawer of the cash-register was wide open. A penny and a nickel lay on the floor, dropped in flight. One of the dicks picked them up, jingled them in the hollow of his hand.

A limp figure was draped half over one of the glass cases, head cradled in arms.

"What's the matter with him — dead?" Keene asked gruffly. "Hey, you!"

The clerk raised his head. Blood glistened on the hair above his ear. "He cut me down with the barrel of his gun," he said weakly. "I had my hands up, but he just gave it to me anyway."

"Well, you saw him at least. What did he look like?"

"I can't tell you that. He had a white handkerchief up to the bridge of his nose, and his hat-brim bent down over it. I couldn't even see his eyes."

"He had to cross from the door there all the way over here to the counter, and you mean you can't even tell me what he was like?" Keene snapped impatiently at the clerk.

"He came in backwards, and he did it so cagey it didn't even look suspicious — like he was looking back at something outside. All I can tell you is he had pretty husky shoulders and was in a gray suit."

"You're a big help," said Keene bitterly. "No wonder they call him The Phantom! That's all we've been able to get our teeth into for weeks. That, and that he's a southpaw-shooter."

The clerk had buried his head again. "I think he gave me a concussion," he groaned muffledly through his arms.

"Here's six cents back," said the other dick sardonically, pitching the coins he'd retrieved into the empty cash-drawer.

Keene went outside again, stood there in the light of the store disgruntledly scuffing at fragments of window-glass with the side of his foot. "Case the inside of that window for his slugs," he said. "You'll probably be able to dig 'em out of a box of cigars or can of tobacco."

An ambulance had clanged up to give the clerk first-aid.

Keene looked up and down the street. "To come in backwards like that, he must have made sure ahead of time there was only one guy in the place. He had to take a minute off to knot on the handkerchief, too. That means he stood in some doorway along here first, before he made the break. Let's try that one over there — it's

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the only one gives a complete view of the inside of the store."

He played his torch around on the floor of the little vestibule when they'd gone over, found nothing but a solitary cigarette-butt.

The beam of his light flicked on past it, then came back again. He reached down, picked it up, studied it in the hollow of his hand. "Glad I didn't pass that up," he murmured to the man who had accompanied him. "I thought the fill looked too black and ragged for an ordinary cigarette. Know what it is?"

The other shook his head.

"A reefer — marihuana. It's his, all right. He got high before the job. Well, we know that much more about him now, and it's not good news. He's building up to a kill. I figured he used something, anyway. He's been pulling these jobs too fast and often. This stuff slows up their sense of time. Hours seem like days and days like weeks."

He dropped the butt in an envelope, thrust it in his pocket.

There wasn't much more to it than that. The Phantom, like so many times before, had shown them a clean pair of heels. Keene and the men under him scoured the neighborhood, afoot and by car, for the better part of the next two hours, without turning up a single clue. It was as though their quarry had vanished into thin air the moment he was outside the cigar store again.

It was nearly three by the time he returned to his own home from headquarters. He was good and tired as he stood there outside his apartment door hunting for his key. He fumbled it when he brought it out and it dropped to the tiled floor. He swore softly under his breath, bent down to get it, and stayed that way for a minute, stooped over.

Close beside the key there was a cigarette-butt. He knew he was just imagining it, that his eyes were playing tricks on him, but its fill looked kind of black and ragged too, just like that other one he'd found in the doorway earlier. He picked it up, tested it for odor. The acrid scent was faint but unmistakable. Marihuana.

He straightened, puzzled. "What's that doing here, outside my own door? Must be somebody living here in the building thinks they're smart, fooling around with this stuff. If I find out who it is, I'll have 'em thrown out on their ear."

He unlocked the door and went in, shaking his head.

Captain Keene smiled humorlessly when he sat down to dinner three nights later and saw the third chair standing at the table, empty. A place had been set in front of it, but in reverse. The fork was at the right, the knife and spoon at the left.

"Charlie won't be home tonight," his wife murmured apologetically.

"Tell me something new," Keene said bitterly. "When is he ever home? Do you know the last time I saw him? A week ago Sunday! I passed him in the doorway, him going out, me com-

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ing in. My own son, living under the same roof with me!"

"That's because you're not often home yourself, Luke," she protested defensively.

"Yes, but I'm on departmental duty. He has no job."

"You should be the last one to throw that up to him," she said accusingly. "He had one ambition ever since he was just a boy in short pants, and you thwarted it. You were the one kept him from it." Her eyes went to a photograph on the mantel while she spoke — a photo of a fine strapping youth in a police uniform, who looked a lot like Keene, only twenty years younger. It still — after five years — had a crepe wreath attached to the frame.

"I gave up one son to the force!" Keene thundered, bringing his fist down on the table. "And one is enough, I'm not giving up the other! I won't let him join the cops, and while I'm still alive what I say goes! But that's no reason why he can't get some other kind of a job. That don't mean he has to skulk in his room all day, with the door locked, and be out all the time at night!"

She shook her head forebodingly. "It's a bad thing to thwart a boy's lifelong ambition, Luke," she warned him. "It embitters him, makes him lose all interest in life, sours him on the world. Sometimes it even turns him into — something much worse than what you kept him from being in the first place."

She lowered her eyes. "Dennis was my boy, too, as much as yours. Don't forget it. But I'd rather lose Charlie the way I lost Dennis, than see him unhappy, eating his heart out, the way you've made him."

"I'm the boss in this house!" he roared.

"You may live to regret it yet, Luke," she sighed.

The phone rang out in the hall. She got up and went out to answer it. She didn't say very much, just, "All right," then she came back again. "Luke, headquarters on the wire, for you."

He shrugged off his domestic tribulations like a snake sheds its skin. His step was brisk, determined, as he went out to the phone. "Keene talking," he said crisply.

It was the commissioner himself. "Keene, you and your men have got to do something about that 'Phantom' gunman! He's done it again. Do you realize that's the sixteenth armed robbery he's committed in a little over six weeks? It's not only a question of the newspapers yapping at my heels now. They've been doing that for weeks past anyway. The man has become a menace to the community at large. He's a mad dog that's got to be exterminated for the sake of the public welfare."

"Where was it this time, Commissioner? I left headquarters myself less than half an hour ago."

"Craven and Burgoyne. We just got the flash about five minutes ago. I'm starting for there now."

"Be right there myself, Commis-

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sioner." Keene hung up, turned to his wife with a taut, "Got to go, Julie."

Most wives know a little something about what their husband's knottiest problems are. "Is it *him* again?" she breathed fearfully.

"Yes, and it's going to cost me my rank if we don't put a stop to him pretty quick! The commissioner meant business just now." He snatched his hat from a peg beside the door. "Don't wait up. No telling when I'll be back."

The door closed after him.

Craven and Burgoyne was another cigar store. Every one of the sixteen had been so far. He seemed to go in for them exclusively. That was how they were so sure it was all the work of one man.

A man was lying on a stretcher on the sidewalk when Keene got there.

"The clerk in charge — is he able to talk?" Keene asked the interne who was bending down examining him.

"Just about," murmured the interne. "You'd better ask him whatever you're going to now. I don't think he'll last till we get him to the hospital."

Keene crouched down, said in a quiet voice: "Did you see him, son?"

The man's eyes opened. "I got him," he said weakly. "I got him this time. The company gave all us night men guns only yesterday. But he came in so quick I couldn't get to mine until he was on his way out again. He shot me from the door when he saw me reach. But then I got up again and crawled out after him. I lost him for a minute. Then I saw him double back down there on Burgoyne Avenue and head the other way. I saw his shape, black against a streetlight. I fired and he sort of jounced, but he went on anyway —"

"But did you see him here in the store? Did you get a look at his face?"

The man's voice had grown weaker, disconnected. "Had a handkerchief over it — shoulders kind of hefty — gun in his left hand —"

The interne and his driver stepped up. "Better let us have him, Cap."

Keene straightened with a sigh. "Same run-around."

"How much longer is this going to go on, Keene?" It was the commissioner's voice. It was ten full minutes before he'd finished saying all he had on his mind. Or so it seemed to Keene, anyway. "Now if you can't handle him, say so — and I'll put someone in charge who can!"

"You can put someone in charge who'll have better luck than me, sir," said Keene respectfully. "But you can't put anyone in charge who'll try any harder."

The last thing he did before he left the scene, an hour later, was to phone the hospital to find out how soon he could question the wounded clerk again.

"He was dead when he got here," was the terse answer.

So now it was murder.

Keene was dog-tired. He opened a drawer, got out his old pipe, thinking

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maybe a puff or two on it would brace him up. The bowl, he found when he'd sat down again, was still full of cold ashes from the last time. Probably he'd been called away while he was in the middle of smoking it. He was always being called away right in the middle of things, like that. He picked up a matchstick, loosened the caked ashes, then looked around for something in which to dump the dottle. Julie had already cleared the table. There wasn't anything handy.

Just then she came out of the kitchen, carrying the garbage-pail in one hand, on her way to empty it.

"Just what I want," he said. "Let's have that a minute, Julie, to knock this thing into, before you take it out."

She seemed strangely frightened all at once by the simple request. First she stopped short, then tried to hurry up toward the door with the pail. "It's — it's full already," she said. "Just let me empty it a second, and I'll bring it right back —"

"Full already?" he said blankly. "How can a little pipeful of ashes take up any room at all?" His expression slowly changed, narrowed as he scrutinized her face. He rose slowly in his seat until he was standing facing her.

"Bring it over here, Julie." He said it quietly, but there was an unmistakable flinty edge of authority to his voice that she didn't dare disobey. "I want to see that pail."

She came toward him slowly, her face white, a little drawn. She set the pail down by him. It wasn't even half full. There was hardly anything in it.

"What was it you didn't want me to see in here —" he began, but she wasn't there in the room with him any more. She'd gone swiftly back into the kitchen without a word.

He took the burnt matchstick he'd used on his pipe and prodded down into the receptacle. When he brought it up again a long skein of something came with it, looped around the end of it. It was stiffened, twisted, brown. He kept pulling it up on the end of the match and suddenly it turned white, broadened out, became soft and filmy. Bloodstained gauze bandaging.

The utter stillness from the kitchen suddenly struck warningly at him. She'd gone in there and there wasn't a sound. He dropped the matchstick and what it held, rose, took three swift steps that carried him across to the kitchen door, through it.

She was standing there by the sink, perfectly motionless, holding one bared arm up before her. In her other hand she held a small, sharp-edged paring knife, poised. He could tell she was trying to summon up courage to stroke it down her extended forearm.

He slapped the hand that grasped it stingingly, and the knife went flying out. He did it only because he loved her, and she'd been about to harm herself.

She turned and tried to smile pleadingly at him — not for herself, he knew.

"That's the answer to what I was going to ask you!" he said hoarsely.

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Then he turned and started slowly out again, toward that other door. The closed one. She ran around in front of him, caught quickly at his shirt-front with both hands. "No, Luke, please. Wait!"

"This is between him and me," he said tersely.

"It's nothing. It could have happened to anyone."

"Why lie to yourself, Julie? You know better. Else why did you try to hide it from me, keep me from finding out?"

"Because I knew you'd think — just what you are thinking."

He put her gently aside, went over and knuckled the closed door.

"Don't, Luke," she pleaded from the kitchen entrance. "This is your home. Your police beat stops at the front door."

"Only," he thought, leaden-hearted, "if crime does too." Aloud he said: "Go into your room, Julie. Don't be frightened."

There was the usual wait — longer than it would take to cross a room, twice as long, three times as long. Then a key turned and the door opened.

Charlie had already turned his back on it, was walking away from the door, by the time there was space enough to see through. Keene stepped in, closed it after him, stood there before it waiting for him to go as far away as he intended to and turn and face him, before he said anything.

He went the whole width of the room away, then turned and they looked at each other across it. They were antagonists — the look showed that plainly. Not out-and-out enemies, perhaps, but wary strangers, measuring one another, neither willing to give an inch.

Charlie Keene was tall and slim, but not too much of either. His face was a little pale now. It was an open-looking face, even somewhat sensitive, but Keene had learned long ago in his work that that didn't mean a thing. There was a taciturn cast to it, superimposed on its naturally friendly, cheerful lineaments, as though its owner had a grudge against the world. He'd worn that same expression for several years.

He was in his shirt-sleeves, and they were rolled to above the elbows for comfort. Keene's eyes rested briefly first on one muscular arm, then on the other, without finding what he was looking for. There had been no stiffness in the younger man's gait when he moved across the room just now, either.

"Lift up your shirt."

Charlie tore it up out of his belt, held it high on his left side. Two intercrossed strips of gauze were revealed, circling his waist, holding a pad of the same substance in place, low on his left side.

He smiled bitterly. "That what you wanted to see?"

"How'd you get it?"

Again that smile. "A stray bullet nicked me, walking along Burgoyne Avenue on my way home from Bernice's last night." He said it quietly,

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but Keene could see his bared chest and diaphragm moving quickly up and down, as though he were taking short, fast breaths — breaths of anger or of fear. He continued to hold his shirt up long after the need for doing so was past, in defiance perhaps.

Keene spoke slowly — the policeman to the suspect.

"Can you prove that?"

"No," his son answered. He let the shirt fall back in place again finally. He was white around the lips. "Can you disprove it?" Their eyes clashed — hard, hostile — struggled for mastery. The younger man was breathing faster all the time. Keene could even see that through his shirt now. A throaty rumble, almost inaudible, came from Charlie. Keene could only make it out by the motion of his lips. "Say it. Say what you're thinking. Say what you came in here to say."

Keene answered with equal indistinctness: "Do I have to?"

He couldn't. He couldn't bring it out into the open between them yet. Once that was done, there'd be no undoing it, no turning back ever, an abyss would have opened that could never be bridged again. And what was the need of saying the final, damning word anyway? They both knew what was meant. It was in the hard, brittle look that continued to pass between them. It was in that fast breathing of Charlie's. And it was in their silence.

Keene turned abruptly. He couldn't see very well just then, but he managed to find the doorknob, turn it, let himself out.

He heard the key click sharply on the inside of the lock a moment later.

He was aware of Julie staring out at him from the doorway of their own room with a white, piteous face as he went slowly by on his way to the front door, but there wasn't anything he could say to her. This wasn't between him and her. It wasn't even between him and Charlie any more. It was between him and himself now.

He picked up his hat and put it fumblingly on his head and found his way out of the apartment.

He didn't think he knew where he was going as he trudged falteringly through the dark streets, with the gait of a man who's had a glass of beer too many. But subconsciously he must have known all along what his destination was. He turned aside finally at the quiet little two-story frame house, went up the walk, rang the doorbell.

A light went on in the hall and Bernice Meredith opened the door for him. She was Charlie's girl. She was a nice wholesome girl. The light was shining through her fluffy brown hair, from behind her, making it seem like gold. He'd always liked her. He'd always thought she'd make just the kind of wife Charlie should have. He felt sorry for her now, but not as sorry as he felt for Julie or himself. At least she could pick up the pieces after a while and start over. They couldn't.

"Why, Captain Keene!" she said cordially. "This is a surprise! Father's taken Mother down to the movies,

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but come on in anyway, won't you?"

"I think I will, darling," he sighed dolefully. "I think I will. My feet are troubling me."

He knew he'd have to feel his way cautiously with her, to find out what he wanted to. She'd defend Charlie, lie for him, if he gave her an inkling of what it was about. She was that kind of girl.

The gunplay had broken at about twenty after twelve. To be creased by a stray bullet on his way home along Burgoyne from here, he would have had to stay with her until nearly midnight, even walking slowly.

He wasn't a police captain for nothing. "Say, did you and Charlie have an argument last night?" he blurted out plausibly. "What made him leave here so early?"

"That's what I'd like to know myself," she admitted unguardedly. "He seemed to have something on his mind. He reached for his hat at ten thirty and walked out on me, and he was so restless and fidgety the whole time he was here, he didn't seem himself at all. I didn't know what to make of it." She laughed confidently. "I'm afraid he has another girl."

"No," he answered dismally. "No, he has no other girl." He stared down at the floor with misleading aimlessness. "How's he been treating you lately? Does he spend much money on you when he takes you out, or is he stingy?"

"Why, the sky seems to be the limit!" she related vivaciously. "He acts like a millionaire. I have to keep telling him, 'Charlie, put the brakes on. You're not working, you know.' He puts a dollar or two on the horses once in a while, and these fantastic long-shots always seem to come in —"

He smiled bleakly to himself. He heard her talking to him after that, but he hardly knew what she was saying any more. He raised his eyes, let them rove about the room. On the mantel he caught sight of a small framed photograph of Charlie. It was just an ordinary snapshot, but it had been taken of him full-length, standing on the steps of her house.

"Say, honey, could I trouble you for a glass of water?" he said meekly.

"Why, of course, Captain Keene."

The minute she was out of the room he was over by the mantel, slipping the picture out of its frame. He thrust it into his inside pocket and laid the frame face-down, so its emptiness wouldn't show.

He got out as soon after that as he could.

"And if you see Charlie, tell him I said —" She called out after him blithely from the front steps.

He shook his head mournfully as he shuffled off into the darkness. He wasn't telling Charlie anything — any more. And Charlie wasn't telling him. He didn't have to.

He went back to headquarters and got out a list of the places The Phantom had held up. Then he jotted down half a dozen of the addresses in his notebook, choosing only the most recent ones.

He made sure the door of his office

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was closed, then took out the full-length snapshot that he'd swiped from the girl's mantel.

Keene, given name Charles — that was the way to put it.

Unconsciously his jaw thrust out, his teeth clenched, white showed through the knuckles of his fists, in outward sign of the fight going on within him. Still going on, even this late in the game! Even after the bloody bandage, and after what Bernice had said.

"You're not sure yet," he told himself doggedly. "You haven't proved it yet. You'd give any stranger the benefit of the doubt, until the weight of the evidence went overwhelmingly against him. Why can't you do as much for him? No favors, but why can't you give him an even break, at least? He could have been creased by a stray bullet, walking along Burgoyne Avenue. It's happened to plenty of people before now. He could have won a hundred or two hundred bucks on random two-dollar bets on the races. That's happened to plenty of people before now, too. He could have left his girl's house at ten thirty, and it still mightn't mean a thing. He could have killed time until midnight somewhere else, and then just happened to be passing by casually, in time to get winged."

But the terrible, remorseless voice of his own experience thundered in his ears, drowning out the thin plea of mercy. "How long have you been in the department? Are you a captain or a rookie fresh from training-school? You picked up a marihuana stub at the scene of one of the crimes, you found another outside your own door. The Phantom was nicked for the first time, as far as is known, last night. And tonight you find bloodstained bandages in your own home. Young Keene" — he couldn't say *your son* even in his own mind, when that voice of duty was roaring in his ears — "left his girl early, only last night, and her innocent expression of surprise shows that hasn't been his habit other times. Finally, they're both left-handed."

The voice rose to a scream. "How much more do you need? How much more do you need? Are you trying to play 'possum? Don't you see there's everything there?"

Involuntarily he raised his hands, cupped them to his ears to shut it out, weaved his head tormentedly from side to side.

He dropped his hands to the snapshot, holding it in place, took a sharp-pointed pencil from his pocket and slowly blacked out the face, obliterating the features between eyebrows and chin.

It was just a figure now, a faceless figure to be identified — like all the other rats who held up places at the point of a gun and shot people down.

There was a knock on the door, and the shadow of someone's knuckles showed momentarily through the frosted glass. He snatched up the photograph, thrust it out of sight in his pocket. Then he said: "Come in." One of his subordinates entered with some report or other.

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Keene left his office about ten minutes later, made the rounds of the half-dozen victims that he had listed. Each time he took out the faceless snapshot, said curtly: "Take a look at this. Forget the clothing, just study the proportions of the man's figure, his height, the width of his shoulders, the general shape of his head. Any points of resemblance between him and the man you glimpsed?"

Three of them answered affirmatively at once. "Yeah, that fellow's build is a lot like his." "He was tall and limber like that, and kind of wide at the shoulders." Two more said, "Hard to say," gave it fifty-fifty rating. Only one out of the six said definitely: "Don't ask me, Cap. I couldn't tell you if you brought him with you and stood him here in front of me. I was too scared to see straight." And even that was a negative exoneration, not a positive one.

In short, none of them was definitely positive, but under the circumstances no one could have been, he would only have shown himself up for a liar and an unreliable witness if he had been, for there was no question of facial recognition involved in this. More important, none of them was positive it was *not* the man on the snapshot.

Keene set down three checks, two question-marks, and only one cross, next to the six names on his list. That meant the faceless man on his picture was anything but in the clear, the balance of identification leaned heavily in his direction.

Keene went home long after midnight, a tired, broken man, dragging his feet along after him. He threw his hat at the peg on the wall, in the dark, heard it miss and fall to the floor, let it stay there. There was a thread of light showing from under the bottom of that closed door on his right. So he was home tonight. Keene might have expected that. This was only the night after — the last time.

In the morning when he came out to the dining-room there was a used coffee cup standing there on the table. He glanced at the door — that door — but it was closed again.

"He's gone out," Julie said quietly, answering his look.

"But locked the door after him," Keene thought.

"How do you get in to do the room?" he asked Julie after a while.

"He doesn't seem to want me to, lately," she admitted reluctantly.

He didn't say anything more after that. When he'd pushed his own cup aside, he took out his little leather notebook and sat there thumbing through it.

She cleared the things away, and then she asked: "Aren't you going down to headquarters today, Luke?"

"Yeah, in a little while. Not just yet, though." Then as she turned to go in again, he called her quietly. "Julie."

She turned and came back to the table again.

"Take down that calendar you've got hanging up on the wall in the kitchen and bring it in here, will you?"

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When she'd brought it and laid it on the table beside him, he said, still in that same quiet, toneless voice: "Julie, I want you to do something for me."

"Yes, Luke?"

"You've got a good memory. You always have had — for dates and little things like that. Think back carefully, try to remember just what nights he's been out the past few weeks —"

The back of her hand went defensively to her mouth. "Luke —" she whimpered pleadingly.

"Don't be frightened. This isn't anything. If you get all worked up, you won't be able to think clearly. Just give me the days of the week, you don't have to bother with the dates." And he tried to reassure her, "I'm just curious to know, that's all."

"No you're not, Luke. Don't try to fool me." But she sat down opposite him, put one hand dismally to her forehead. "He was out night-before-last," she said in a wan, lifeless voice. "To see Bernice —"

He lidded his eyes scornfully at that, but didn't say anything.

"And last week, he was out on Friday. I remember that because it was the night we had fish, and he didn't tell me he wasn't going to be home, and I bought half-a-pound too much and had to give it to the cat."

Her voice droned on. "He was out Monday night of last week, too. And the week before that he was out in all that terrible rain — what night was that? Thursday — I remember distinctly, because I was so worried about him. I was afraid he'd get a chill —"

He lidded his eyes contemptuously again. His hand kept moving across the calendar each time she spoke, penciling in an *X* on each of the date-blocks as she mentioned them.

Her voice died away at last. "I can't go back any further than that, Luke."

"That's far enough," he told her grimly. "You've gone back four weeks, one calendar month."

She got up and went inside without a word. He heard a choked sob sound in her throat as she left the room.

He opened his notebook, started to check off the dates of The Phantom's depredations, which he had listed in it, against the crossed-off date-blocks on the calendar. When he'd finished there wasn't one without a check against it. As far back as she'd gone, anyway. Charlie had gone out more times than there had been hold-ups reported. But every time a hold-up *had* occurred, Charlie had been out. He hadn't been home once on a night The Phantom had been busy. What could be more conclusive than that?

Julie had pulled herself together, come back again. She knew what he'd been driving at just now. "Talk to him, Luke," she said forlornly. "Maybe if you'd talk to him, show him that you're for him, not against him —"

"It's too late, Julie."

"We don't know for sure, Luke."

"*I* do. That's my business — crime. I know all the earmarks. He's head over heels in the middle of it, too deep ever to be pulled out again."

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He stood up. The time for indecision was past. His face was set in lines of granite that nothing could alter. The black notebook flipped closed under his thumb, went into his pocket.

"I haven't much money. I've been an honest cop, and honest cops don't have much money. I've never done a crooked thing — until now. And now I'm about to, for the first time in my life."

Something fell on the table before her.

"In that sealed envelope there's two hundred dollars. Two hundred *clean* dollars. Give it to him when he comes in, Julie. Tell him it'll buy a lot of distance. Give him this message from me. Tell him *there's a cop in the house with him.* Tell him he has until this time tomorrow night. He'll know what I mean. I'm not doing this for him, Julie, nor to keep my own good name clean. I'm doing it for you."

He turned around and walked out with the stiff slowness of a sleepwalker.

He came in shortly after dark the following night. The first thing he saw was that same white sealed envelope, balanced across the knob of Charlie's door. He walked slowly over to it, picked it up. It hadn't been opened.

Julie had heard him come in. She came to the door of the kitchen, looked out at him. "He said to tell you that running away is for the guilty." Her apron went accusingly to the corner of her eyes. "Between the two of you, you're tearing me apart!"

"So he thinks he'll trade on his relationship to me," Keene muttered grimly. "So he thinks he's safer here than he'd be anywhere else, eh? Well, he's wrong. His immunity's run out. Get me the key to this door. Where is it?"

"He always takes it with him. He went out a little while ago."

He drew his gun, about to shoot the lock out.

"Luke," she wailed, "the neighbors —"

"This is police business now. This isn't a family affair any more. Wait a minute, I've got something —" He sheathed his gun again, turned and went into his own room, came back in a minute with a skeleton key. He tried it and the simple lock fell open.

"Go back in the kitchen, Julie," he said over his shoulder. "Don't watch me." He went into Charlie's room and closed the door after him.

The shade was down. It was always down to the bottom, day or night. Keene snapped on the light. There wasn't much to be seen at first glance. Just anyone's room. A bed, a dresser, a pair of chairs. A couple of his ties were hanging down over the mirror-arm of the dresser. A snapshot of Bernice Meredith was sticking out of the edge of the glass. Keene scowled a little at that. Her photograph didn't belong in — a gangster's room, a killer's room.

He sluiced drawers open and shut,

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deftly spaded his hands through layers of shirts and underclothing with a professional economy of effort. He wasn't ashamed. He was a detective going through a suspect's room.

In the bottom of the lower drawer he found the cartridges — for a .38. The gun must be on him right now, for it wasn't around. His eyes were hard-edged slits as they rested on the slugs. Every one of them might mean a policeman's life. He pocketed them, but he wasn't through yet.

The clothes closet was locked too, but the passkey did for that just what it had for the room-door. A couple of suits, a coat, a worn-out hat. He went through pockets and a stray, overlooked penny fell out, rolled across the floor. He picked it up and saw that it had a tiny hole bored through it. So it hadn't been overlooked, it was meant to be kept, a good-luck piece, a charm. He shook his head.

"It's run out on him."

He felt a scrap of paper between his fingers in one of the pockets, pulled it out and found himself looking at a pink betting-slip. *Cavalier* was the name of the horse, and Charlie had put two dollars on it to show. Just like he'd told Bernice — although this one, of course, hadn't come in, or he wouldn't have retained the slip.

For a minute the whole structure of Keene's conviction of Charlie's guilt shook. Another blow like that, no matter how slight, and it would have come toppling down. Already he felt a fierce stab of gladness ahead of time in his heart.

Then suddenly his eyes came to rest on that thing in the corner. He'd missed seeing it until now, in the shadows behind the clothing. A long, rolled-up cylinder leaning upright against the wall. He reached for it and sharp pain flashed through his fingertip, as though a pin had pricked him. He carried it out into the room where the light was better and unrolled it.

It was a city map, of the sort that can be obtained at any stationery store. A jagged oblong of paper was pinned to one corner of it, as if for reference.

He carried it over to the dresser with him, spread it out, and weighed it down at each of the four corners so that it wouldn't curl up.

The pinned-on leaf was thin and closely printed in vertical columns. It had been torn from an ordinary city telephone directory. It was the page listing all the cigar stores in the city belonging to a certain well known chain. More than a third of them, starting from the top down, with just an omission here and there, bore a pencil-check alongside. Keene didn't have to refer to the list in his own notebook. Instant recognition leaped into his mind at sight of certain of the addresses. *Burgoyne and Craven*, *18th and Tillary*. They were the places that had been held up by The Phantom.

And on the map there was a corresponding pin stuck at each location, tallying with an address on the checked list, each one with a circle penciled around it. As if that weren't enough, they had the dates on which

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the hold-ups had occurred scrawled next to them. And those tallied, too, of course. *May 4th and 8th*, and so on.

Suddenly as Keene pored over it, his eyes dilated. There was one too many of those pins on the map, one that had no check against it on the list of accomplished hold-ups, one that his book held no record of — as yet. It was not a circle but a quadrangle, coinciding with the corner of Haven and Darrow Streets, in a zone in which The Phantom had not appeared yet. And next to it, in Charlie's handwriting, *About May 12th.*

The twelfth was tonight!

He'd not only kept a painstaking, vainglorious record of all his past hold-ups, but he'd actually staked out the next one to come. Here, in the house of Detective-Captain Keene!

It was easy to see what system he used. It was the infinitely simple one of going columnwise down the list of one certain chain of cigar stores in the city directory — an angle that somehow had escaped the police until now. After all, the physical location of the places was haphazard, there had been no clue to send them to the directory, where a single glance would have given them the key. If they only had, they would have been able to stop him weeks ago. He probably looked over each succeeding prospect a day or two before, skipped it if it didn't do enough business to make the take worth while or was in too congested a neighborhood, and went on to the next.

Well, the next was at the corner of Haven and Darrow Streets — about midnight tonight.

Keene straightened slowly. He rounded a fist and brought it down on the map with a slow, grinding motion. "We've got him now!" he breathed through clenched teeth.

The evidence was strong enough, already, to get him here and now in this room when he came back. But there was Julie. Poor, heartbroken Julie. He couldn't arrest him here under her very eyes. He'd killed already. He'd try to kill again before he'd let himself be taken. Let it be away from here, then. That was the better way. He'd set the time and the place for his own finish, and retribution would meet him there.

Keene rolled up the map, thrust it back into the shadowy recesses of the closet where he'd found it, relocked the door with his passkey. Then he came out of the room and locked that door behind him too. The police didn't give their enemies warning.

He said in a lifeless voice, "Guess I was wrong, Julie," so she wouldn't warn him his room had been entered, cause him to cancel his plans. He tried not to look at her face as it lit up hopefully.

"No, don't ask me to eat," he said sickly. "I've got to go right out. I've got a lot to attend to."

"Luke, you look so white. Surely it can wait a moment, until you at least take a mouthful."

"It can't wait," he said hollowly. "It's the — toughest assignment of my career."

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Her voice quavered after him as he moved slowly down the hall. "I suppose you'll be in late again?"

"Very late." And under his breath he added: "Or maybe not at all."

He groped for his hat, straightened, drew a deep breath that seemed to come up from the depths of his being. All weakness must stop at this threshold. Once his feet moved over it he was not father any more, he was Captain Luke Keene.

He threw the door open and Charlie was there on the other side of it, as though he'd just that moment stepped up.

For the first time in weeks they were close together, face to face, instead of a room-length away from each other, glaring watchfully, as they had been most of the time the past few years. Maybe it was that. Maybe it was because his own feet were still on the inside of the threshold. An erratic, unwelcome thought passed through Keene's mind. "He has Julie's eyes. And his face — no matter what he's done — it's still my own face, twenty years ago."

It's hard to hate yourself, it's hard to kill yourself.

Three times he tried to speak and couldn't bring the words out. He swallowed hard and finally they came — low, indistinct. "Charlie, don't go out tonight."

There was a white flash in the face before him, and suddenly he was looking at a resentful enemy again. That bitter mask had dropped back into place.

Charlie's hands clenched at his sides. He too seemed to have trouble speaking. "You kinda make me think maybe I will."

Keene's feet were already carrying him over the threshold. He heard the door close behind him. He didn't even look around. His footfall was brisk and firm on the stone flooring of the outer hall. He didn't walk like an old, tired man now, the way he had lately. All weakness had been locked up behind him in there. There wasn't a soft line in his face. There wasn't a warm drop of blood in his whole body. He wasn't a man any more. He was just a badge and a gun going some place.

By ten thirty a dragnet was already in place around that quadrangle formed by the corners of Haven and Darrow. Every dark doorway along the four arms branching off from the intersection held its quota of two or three invisible armed men. Those four streets leading away would be blocked off midway down their lengths as soon as the signal had been given that told he had passed through the cordon and was in the trap. For signal, of course, his own act of violence would have to suffice, since he was still not known by sight to any of them — but one.

Once in, it would be humanly impossible for him to get out again. Eleven o'clock was the deadline when a sort of quarantine went into effect. Anyone who tried to enter the barred zone after that time was automatically suspect. Anyone who lived there and

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attempted to leave, no matter how urgent his business, was turned back and kept in, lest he inadvertently spread the tidings that a police trap had been set up and thus warn off their quarry. No, they weren't taking any chances.

Keene wondered privately if that "Don't go out tonight, Charlie," of his, given in a moment of weakness, hadn't already spiked their whole scheme. But try as he might, he couldn't regret giving it.

It was a lot of effort to expand to capture just one man. But that one man had run up a score of sixteen hold-ups in six weeks and set a new high in elusiveness.

Keene was in full charge. He had told the commissioner that he had received his information by a tip over the wire, that the source was known to him personally and could be trusted. Beyond that he did not go. They'd know all they needed to when the smoke had cleared away. He knew that if he had told them whom he knew it to be, the first thing they'd do would be to take him off the job and put someone else in his place. Trying to be kind, they'd only be ten times crueler. That was the one thing he couldn't have endured tonight — having to sit home twiddling his thumbs, waiting to be told when it was all over.

Keene chose an ink-black crevice between two buildings for his own vantage point, backed up by two other men. It wasn't even wide enough to allow two of them to peer from its mouth abreast. They had to sandwich themselves into it Indian file. It was several doors down from the designated cigar store that was the focus of all this, on the opposite side, but it was the closest he could get, as the space directly opposite was occupied by a billboard that offered no points of concealment.

At a quarter to eleven he made a last stealthy round of his outposts, giving them their final instructions in a terse whisper. "Don't move until I do. And when I break out, don't you men close in toward the store. Your job is to bottle up this street, form a human chain across it."

At the lower end of Darrow, a block away from the cigar store, there was a drug store. His tour of supervision took him well toward it. The last nest of hidden police was only a door or two up from it. He didn't have to go all the way down to it. He glanced at it twice, about to turn and go back to his own listening-post. Instead, he finally went down the remaining short distance toward the pharmacy, stepped inside. It was ten minutes to eleven.

He called his own home. "Julie," he said in a low, fearful voice, "this is Luke. Did he — stay home tonight? Is he there?"

"He went out, Luke."

He hung up without another word. A drop of sweat trickled down over his eyebrow as he came out of the store. He went back and melted into his own cranny and the wait began.

He tried not to think while he stood

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there motionless in the inky pall, the brick sides of the two adjoining buildings touching both his arms at once, the place was so narrow. An unnatural quiet descended on the vicinity, made all the more acute by the very presence of the police, since they were thinning out all street activity. Cars were being rerouted by the men on traffic duty all around the perimeter of the forbidden zone, whenever they had women in them or were bulky commercial vehicles that might have lent themselves to becoming barriers — to *his* advantage.

Lights began going out here and there. Only the cigar store that was the object of their vigil remained unsuspectingly alight — and strangely unpatronized. The clerk on duty inside wasn't in their confidence. There had been a discussion at headquarters, before they started out, about the advisability of substituting one of their own men in his place for decoy. The concensus of opinion had finally been that to do so might frustrate them. *He* undoubtedly cased these places well, before selecting each one, familiarized himself with the routine and habits of the man in charge. The sight of a new face behind the counter, on the very night he had chosen for his attempt, might awaken his suspicions, cause him to steer clear of it. The decision had finally been to leave the usual manager undisturbed at his post, and not to inform him of what was afoot. His nervousness might be too noticeable, give rise to similar suspicion. It meant jeopardizing the man's life to a certain extent, but they felt they could jump in fast enough to protect him.

A church a few blocks down tolled the half-hour, and they were getting into the home-stretch now. He'd seldom appeared before midnight. He'd seldom appeared very long after it either. To the others it was just a long, strained wait. To Keene it was protracted agony. It was a cool night, but he kept mopping his brow with his sleeve.

Keene thought: "I hope he shows up. It's better if he does. It's better to have it over with. Better than having to go around to my house afterward, alone or with Burke and Massey here, to get him — in front of *her*." He wondered: "Is there some way I can still keep them from knowing, even afterwards? Empty all six chambers into his face, so they can't tell who he was? They'd find out soon enough, in other ways." He thought: "How am I going to face them afterwards, all these guys that have known me for years? They won't say anything to my face, but how am I going to stand their pity, day after day, week after week? I'll hand in my resignation. But that won't help much, I'll still have to live with my own disgrace. Maybe he'll get me first. That would be the best way. Then there won't have to be any tomorrow. But he'll have to go with me. He mustn't live to kill any other cop."

He raised his head slightly, nodded to himself unseen in the dark. "And if he misses, I can take care of that after-

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wards. One of them, in here, will see to that. The last one out."

One of the men wedged in behind him let out a long exhalation of weariness from standing still so long.

"Soon now," breathed Keene. "Take it easy."

The clock started to strike midnight.

There was somebody moving, way down there at the lower end of Haven. Some pedestrian coming this way. There had been one or two of them before now, so there was no certainty in it yet. He was moving along close to the building-line, passing outpost after outpost of concealed police. The shadows blotted him out time and again, and an occasional street-light gave him back to them. He flitted by under each one too quickly to be identified.

At that moment the window lights of the cigar store went out, leaving a single dim bulb burning at the back, as the attendant prepared to close up and go home. Keene cursed silently, it made everything out here that much darker.

The oncoming figure was well across the deadline now, approaching the intersection. There was a street-light directly on the corner, but unfortunately, on the opposite side from him. Still it cast a sufficiently revealing radiance. "I'll know when he gets under that," thought Keene.

"Get ready," he breathed low across his shoulder.

The figure turned and glanced back the way he had come. Then he came on a few steps more. Then he looked behind him a second time. That was once too often. Anyone that did that had something on his mind.

He was up to the ghostly pool of light now. Keene thrust his face forward, eyes straining out of his head. The oncoming form deliberately detoured, swerved aside to avoid the circle of light. The globe over there was shaded. The light crept up him only as high as his waist. Long, gray-suited legs showed. The rest of him stayed in shadow. But Keene was able to snatch a sample of his gait, his carriage. It looked a lot like Charlie's walk, allowing for the distortion of caution and tension that tightened it up.

The stealthy form crossed Darrow, reached the cigar store just as the last light went out inside. His timing was uncanny, he must have rehearsed his movements down to the last split second, to get there just when he did.

The door opened and the clerk came out, just as the other stepped up. The two of them stood there for an instant, two shapes blended into one. Even from as close as where Keene was, not an overt move, not a sign of violence, was visible. One moment they were both standing there together, the next the store entrance was empty again, both had gone inside.

Five seconds ticked off. The door had closed, but the store-light didn't go on again, the interior remained dark.

"This is it, boys," said Keene,

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tightlipped, and followed his gun out into the open.

A heavy thud sounded from inside the store as he broke cover. He'd killed again. That was the death-shot muffled by the closed-up store. Killed without any excuse, for sheer love of killing, for surely that helpless clerk hadn't offered any resistance in there in the dark.

The door opened and closed with the rapidity of a shuttering camera-lens, while Keene was still halfway to it, and the manager came stumbling out alone, as though he'd been pushed through. He fell down flat, half over the curbing, and lay there head-down without another move.

Keene was running up diagonally from the cranny that had held him so long, bent low, gun forward. Behind him the smacking footsteps of Burke and Massey paced his own, trying to overtake him.

He swerved and motioned them back. "I'm going in there alone."

"But Cap, what're we here for?"

"I said I'm going in and take him alone. Those're my orders. You just keep this entrance blocked."

He took their obedience for granted, and it was given — it had to be at such a time. He reached the door, stood there making a perfect target against its wire-meshed glass for an instant, for dark as the neighborhood was, it was still lighter outside than in. He pushed the thumb latch down, flung the door wide, stepped in and it ebbed back and clicked shut again behind him. He wanted it that way. They were alone now, just the two of them.

He couldn't see a thing, but he stood motionless and listened. He heard breathing, the breathing of something at bay, midway down the length of the store from him.

He raised his gun toward that telltale flux of human breath, dead-center before him. Three times his finger tightened on the trigger, and three times it loosened again, unable to draw all the way in. His gun dropped downward toward the floor again.

"You first, Charlie," he said with quiet bitterness. "Right here in front of you."

Without an instant's compunction orange gun-flame slashed out of the darkness toward his voice. Something cut his hat off his head. Then it came a second time, but The Phantom had already shifted between shots. The second blast came sideways, from a different direction, and missed him entirely. Then a third time, and he'd danced around back to his first position again, but that missed too.

Keene spoke again, as his gun came up. "All right, Charlie, you've had your try. Now it's my turn."

He fired toward the position the first and third shots had come from, dead center before him. And now that he'd begun, he kept it up, as though determined to make a good job of it. He counted them as they came out. One, two, three, four, five. Something had thudded heavily to the floor between his first and second, threshed around slightly between the

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second and third, lain still after that. The sixth he held onto. That was for — somebody else.

It was over.

He brought the gun up higher, and around and inward. Found the side of his head with it, held it steady. He pulled and it clicked hollowly against his skull. It had missed!

"I don't even have any luck in —" was the half-thought forming in his mind as he got ready to try again.

A voice was yelling at him out of the darkness. "Dad! For God's sake, don't! What're you trying to do!"

The gun slid down from the side of his head, stayed there hooked at the end of his fingers. A light flashed on at the back of the store, and there was Charlie looking at him from outside one of the phone booths whose bulb he had caused to light by closing the slide before it.

Midway between them an inert figure lay on the floor, blood slowly soaking up through the white handkerchief knotted around his face.

Keene's gun fell the rest of the way out of his hand, and then it did go off, splintering the floor an inch away from his foot. Neither of them even glanced down at it.

Charlie had a very white, scared face. "I saw your arm go up — there was just enough light coming in from behind you," he said hoarsely. "What was the idea of —" His eyes went to that motionless figure midway between them. "I get it," he said softly.

"I guess we both got him," he added. "I hit him after that first shot he took at you, but I don't think he was out yet. You must have been the one to finish him."

"H-how did you get in here?"

"I've been in here since nine-thirty." He motioned to an *Out-of-order* sign on the end booth. "I slipped in and squatted down out of sight in there when the manager was busy waiting on a customer. I was going to let myself be locked in all night, to get the drop on him if I had to —"

"You were willing to risk your own life like that, to get him, Charlie?"

Charlie gave him a look, smiled a little. "What would you do, if the cop whose opinion you valued most thought you were that very guy? My only way of showing that it wasn't me was by getting him myself."

Keene looked down at the floor.

"I had to get him in self-defense," Charlie went on. "I've been out every time that he was, hoping I'd run into him, and plenty of times that he wasn't. I was always in the wrong part of town. I picked up a marihuana butt that he dropped near one of the places, and I've been accosting peddlers ever since, hoping to get a line on him in that way, but it didn't work.

"The closest was that night on Burgoyne Avenue. I got in the cross-fire, and got creased. He got away from me, and I had to sprint to keep from getting caught myself. Then accidentally I opened a city directory the other night, wondering if there wasn't some way in which I could dope out, by charting his movements on a map, which part of town he used for a base

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of operations. That was the most I hoped to be able to get by doing that, but I got much more. I got the whole works! I saw at a glance that he'd been working his way down that very page I was looking at. It almost seemed too good to be true, but there it was. I was going to tell you at first — but then you had to go and offer me money to take it on the lam! I saw red. There was only one thing left for me to do after that.

"I figured out the approximate time of his next appearance by rationing the intervals between each of his former exploits. Three days was the shortest, five the longest. That gave me four. Probably reefer-crazed, he got high twice a week, and went out and worked it off. Tonight was the fourth night since the last time. But just to make sure of not missing him this time, I was on the job here last night, but he didn't show up. I was coming around again tomorrow night, if it hadn't worked tonight."

Keene turned around, and they were all crammed in the open doorway, Burke and Massey and all the rest, drinking it all in. His chest went out and his shoulders went back. "There's your Phantom, men," he boomed, motioning toward the floor. "Come in and meet the man who finally got him for us. My son."

He stood there looking on proudly, while they ganged up around Charlie congratulating him, pounding his back, and firing questions at him. Finally someone turned to him and asked: "What's he doing in civvies, Captain? He's a natural for the force."

Keene rubbed the back of his neck awkwardly, didn't seem to know what to say for a minute.

"Is it O.K. with you — now?" Charlie Keene asked him with quiet eagerness. "About enrolling in police school and trying for the exams?"

Keene wagged his head defiantly. "I'd like to see the man who'd try to stop you!"

Did you —

GET HIM OUT OF THIS?

(*Solution to puzzle on inside front cover*)

Snip Carton, awakening, realizes his awful dilemma, and solves it in a second. Rolling onto a barnacle, he manages to saw through the ropes. He then reties the rope, casts the anchor over the nearest of the small rocks and hauls himself over the quicksand, repeating the process until he reaches the foot of the cliffs. Snip, an expert mountain-climber, scales them with the anchor and the rope and makes his way to safety.

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WINNER OF A THIRD PRIZE: NIGEL MORLAND

We welcome, for the first time in EQMM, the immensely popular English writer, Nigel Morland, and his equally popular Mrs. Pym. When asked for biographical data on himself and on Mrs. Pym, Nigel Morland came through with a piece that we could not dream of improving. So, in a free adaptation of the author's own words, we give you Mr. M. and Mrs. P.:

In the late 1920s, Nigel Morland returned home from the Far East with hundreds of short stories in his trunk. He went to see his lifelong family friend, Edgar Wallace.

Wallace read the manuscripts — and was appalled. "My dear boy," he groaned, "if you keep this up, you will become the king of tripe." He told the almost-stricken Morland that not only was he writing himself out, but there was not a single feature in all those hundreds of stories that was right. And then Wallace, continuing in the role of a Dutch uncle, advised: "Don't write another word. Sit tight until you're ready. Wait ten years if necessary. In the meantime — listen, learn, observe."

But Edgar Wallace proved himself a constructive critic as well as a devastatingly destructive one. He gave the young writer a concrete character suggestion. Think over, he said, the idea of a woman detective: make her middle-aged — tough — difficult to get along with — and a know-it-all. Wallace even suggested her name — call her Mrs. Pym. And, yes, put her in Scotland Yard — give her some power there — and let her run wild.

"Yes, my boy, mull over her for five to ten years, then write a novel about her — and you'll sell it!"

And, by the great god of gumshoes, so it came to pass.

Mrs. Pym evolved slowly. It was six years before she came to life. She turned out to be the direct antithesis of every known female ferret. She is not young. She dresses badly, in ugly tweeds. She is rough, tough, and hardboiled. She is grim-looking, harsh in her speech and manner, and as dominating a dame as ever browbeat the male of the species. She is strong enough physically to depend on her own fists. She wears the world's dowdiest and most dreadful hats . . . Yet, it cannot be said that she is a masculine woman.

In 1934, Mrs. Pym emerged in a full-length manuscript titled THE MOON MURDERS. *The first British publisher to see the story bought it in*

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less than a week. But when the novel appeared, it got the critical lambasting of the year. Howard Spring, in "The London Evening Standard," wrote a special review, tearing Mrs. Pym to bits and pieces.

But once launched, Mrs. Pym could not be sunk. Immediately, all the critics notwithstanding, the public took her to their hearts. They loved her hats, her rough language, her riproaring, ripsnorting ways. On later books, "Torquemada" of "The Observer," one of England's most highly respected mystery reviewers, took Edgar Wallace's place in Morland's life, and patiently, tirelessly, showed Nigel how to write more muscularly; eventually "Torquemada" said of a Morland novel: "Since Edgar Wallace died I have not read a London crook tale so worthy, for mystery, speed, and humanity, of Edgar Wallace at his best."

So, now meet Mrs. Palmyra Pym (we almost said Mrs. Sam Spade!), who has been dubbed "The Ace Scotland Yardress" and "Public Energy Number One" and "that enchanting old battleaxe" — except that her first appearance in EQMM relates a case which occurred before 1935, before she became the indomitable Mrs. Assistant-Commissioner of Scotland Yard — the first and only early adventure of the powerful Mrs. Pym.

FLOWERS FOR AN ANGEL

by NIGEL MORLAND

SOME WOMEN have said that Mrs. Pym was never young, that even in her initial stages she was probably an elderly baby. Obviously, such women should drink their milk out of saucers; still, it is a fact that Mrs. Pym was somehow stolid, enormously capable, and frequently harsh, even in the early 1920s when she must have been around thirty.

She affected the same ugly tweeds and the same air of magnificent omnipotence, as she does today. But her hair was brown then, with only the faintest touch of her current grayness. Her speech was as biting, and her contempt for authority and inefficiency as ready as on that notable day in 1935 when she crashed the shocked portals of New Scotland Yard, the first woman ever to hold rank in Central C.I.D., where, in these present jittery times of H-bombs, she is Mrs. Assistant-Commissioner Pym.

In those extraordinary 1920s she had drifted away from the job of chief secretary to the Director of Remounts (War Office, Special Serv-

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ice) in China, where they were still talking about her merciless "I think we're supposed to mount the British Army on Mongolian ponies; God knows why, but we Islanders are notable at confounding the enemy — particularly with the war over and done with!" She arrived, of all places in this world, as a woman detective-sergeant in the surprised ranks of the Shanghai Municipal Police Force.

I was still a cub reporter on the Shanghai *Evening Star*. "Still," because I had publicly stated that Benjamin Cudworth, that aristocratic darling of the Shanghai Club, was selling guns to Wu Pei-fu (which later turned out to be the truth). It made me less than the dust beneath worthy British shoes — me, the Chinese, the Griffins, and the miserable itinerants who were not even Shanghailanders. But it was enough for Mrs. Pym; if she'd been in India she would have turned up at a Hindu dinner-party with an Untouchable. That seemingly granite exterior regarded all stiles as something to help lame dogs over — even if she usually kicked them on their way.

I used to go round to her flat in Bubbling Well Road, where I could watch the races, or the golfers in the middle of the central race-course. She always had a liking for reporters — wasn't she one herself for a year? — though what she told me about the local social set should not have been poured into my nineteen-year-old ears: I thought the Country Club people were next to holiness — *she* stripped off their outward façade with the zest of a kid tearing the wrapping off candy.

Her private life was a mystery to me. I knew Richard Pym had been a retired ironmaster, that he had died a few months after their marriage (the Country Club went to town on that!), and that because the Municipal Council was regretting her appointment she was given no more than routine assignments — mostly traffic violations and such things — which were not C.I.D. work at all.

But when Klara Dimmick came drifting down the Whangpoo one chill winter's night, it became Mrs. Pym's business. She and I were in a large sampan, illegally moored off the Customs' Wharf. She was bartering for some rather nice jade which the boatman said was his father's — he claimed to be a refugee from Nanking. I daresay the jade was loot, since Wu Pei-fu was on the rampage: when those old-time *tuchuns* broke out, it was every native for himself.

An uproar from the family end of the sampan brought Mrs. Pym from under the reed-matted mid-structure, and there was Klara, large, Nordic, and beautiful, sitting gracefully in the stern of a dinghy, drifting superbly on the muddy, littered current.

The dinghy was gaffed. Mrs. Pym craned over to have a look.

"Klara Dimmick," I said, "wife of —"

"All right, son, I know Dimmick of China Oil. H'm . . . that looks like a dagger wound in her front."

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"Murder?"

"Could be." She snapped at the chattering sampan family in Shanghai dialect which, naturally, none of them understood; but her tone promoted something like silence. "Showy piece, isn't she?" Mrs. Pym's sniff was loud. A violent woman herself, she dislikes physically ostentatious human beings. "Lug her to the bank and we'll have a look-see."

You can't keep anything quiet in China. Every idler on the Bund had gathered round when we checked over Klara on the edge of the Customs' Wharf. The Chinese spectators were I-told-you-so-ing for all they were worth because, they maintained, her red hair was the unluckiest thing that could happen to her. I suggested the dagger wound was more immediately so. Mrs. Pym grimaced.

"Don't be childish, boy." She picked out an intelligent-looking coolie and told him to nip along to the Dzing-boo-vaung for help — the very mention of the police station scared him off. Finally, a stout Chinese who looked like, and admitted he was, a compradore agreed to do the job if she paid for a rickshaw on a generous basis — a Scot has nothing on a Chinese when it comes to money.

Mrs. Pym, wearing a camel's-hair overcoat which gave her an impressive heaviness, crouched on the edge of the Wharf, studying the corpse. I knelt beside her, focusing the torch.

"That's a good coat she's wearing, though it's the wrong shade of mauve for a redhead, and she's too big for the double-breasted style." Her blue-gray eyes glanced at me with faint malice. "One of her earrings has fallen off — see it, caught in the coat folds? Not there, you blind young ass — on the left side, where it's buttoned." I saw the gewgaw and nodded my comprehension. "I doubt if it means anything much. Oh, *we-tsen, we-tsen!*" The encroaching crowd moved back at the order. "Haul that painter up and let's see." Mrs. Pym paused. I had grabbed the rope, pulling its sodden, clammy length. At the end, attached with a bit of baling wire, was a bunch of ordinary red poppies, though the river had washed many of the heads away.

Mrs. Pym's snort was terrific.

"Is that supposed to be significant? Our thoughtful murderer! A coffin would have been more useful — here, give me those flowers." She wrapped them in the man's handkerchief she always carried, for though she was not that major horror, a masculine woman, she loathed the frail, feminine fripperies women are said to prefer.

"Won't there be trouble if you take those flowers?"

"Son, I've had trouble all my life. This is my case and I'll damn well handle it Pym fashion. I'm sick of chasing birds who sound their hooters after midnight — this time I'm having my own way." She turned at the tramp of feet on the road. Inspector Gaylor, that big, amiable police officer from Wicklow, was there with his squad. "Oh, it's you! Inspector, somebody stabbed a hole in Klara Dim-

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mick, chucked her in this dinghy, and I'm handling the case — and no loopy S.M.C. councilor is going to stop me!"

Gaylor waved protestingly.

"Why, ma'am, would you have me comment?" His smile was infectious — at least, I smiled back. "I'm only a poor cop, doing his duty. Now why would I be wanting to take the case away from you?"

When the examination was over, Gaylor said: "Sort of thing a native would do."

"Native my foot!" Mrs. Pym gestured irately. "You never came across one of them with that kind of imagination — betcha million dollars you never did! No," she added, shaking the orthodox Gaylor to the roots, "we'll find the beginnings of this somewhere in our own sacred upper crust, and when I've finished, I'll teach that socially-elect jellyfish to swing something out of Nick Carter on me!"

Ernest Dimmick was roused from bed at two o'clock in the morning. He lived in a very respectable house opposite the French Club. It did not matter a row of native beans to Mrs. Pym that she was in the French Concession on her official occasions; she administered the law as it stood, and when it didn't she made personal adjustments.

The Number One boy brought him down, and Dimmick received us in the florid sitting-room. He was a gentle little man, with brown hair and brown eyes behind thick-glassed spectacles. You could almost see Mrs. Pym wondering why meek, small men always marry massive women, seemingly chosen from the front row of the Valkyrie chorus.

"Good evening," said Dimmick, as politely as if he were receiving expected guests. The Shanghai papers had made a sensation out of Mrs. Pym's appointment to the S.M.P., so he knew his visitor. "Is there something I can do for you?"

"I came about Mrs. Dimmick."

"Klara? Oh, yes. Er — perhaps there's something I can do — you see, my wife is at the Light Horse Ball."

"I see. Alone?"

"Oh, no. Won't you sit down? Drinks, perhaps?" Dimmick glanced at me helplessly in face of uncompromising refusals. "Mrs. Dimmick went with Mr. Thrane and his party. I felt somewhat unwell, so I did not go with them."

"Anything serious?"

"Serious?" Dimmick's brown eyes were anxious. "Oh, I see what you mean. No, nothing. A touch of dysentery, I think. I foolishly ate some Chinese melon two days ago. It was that, I imagine."

"What time did Mrs. Dimmick leave?"

"At six, I'm told. They were dining at the Palace, and going on to the Astor House for the Ball. Is there anything wrong?"

"I'm afraid there is." Bluntly, but not unkindly, she told him what had happened. Dimmick took it badly.

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He sank into an armchair and covered his eyes with one hand, a gesture that would have looked theatrical in a more positive man.

"Mrs. Pym, I don't know what to say. I can't — can't think who would have done such a dreadful thing. And I never even saw her!"

"What do you mean?"

"I did not get home from the office till seven. She had already left. I haven't seen her since yesterday morning, and to think I might have spent the day . . ." There was nothing more we could do. We left little Dimmick with his grief.

Mrs. Pym owned a noisy red Bugatti, fast predecessor of the mechanical bullets she was to favor in later life. She drove with her customary violence.

"Went to a ball in a dark blue dress and a double-breasted coat!" Her sniff was devastating. "Dimmick's being taken for a sucker, if you ask me. Son —" she paused to bang the horn at a dawdling rickshaw coolie, cursing him liberally as she went by — "son, there's more in this than meets a blind cat's eye. Know anything about Klara?"

"Not much. She was a Klara Zimmermann before she married. Came from Tsingtao, where the Germans are. She's about thirty, I think. Got a good reputation. She's on the board of the Rickshawmen's Mission. I've never heard anything but good about her."

"Huh! That tells me what I want to know." The uncharitable remark was typical. "No children?" I shook my head. "My friend, if you ever want to be suspicious, then suspect a good German girl with a nice little husband when she has no children." She braked the Bugatti in front of central police headquarters. "Come on in. I'll see the dogs don't bite you."

Lights were burning and there was an air of excitement. A murdered European was something apart from routine — the police station felt like my office when an exclusive story comes in. The Shanghai Municipal Council, in the form of the chairman, a tubby little man named Belper — he made half a million when he started the omnibus service — was there, throwing his weight about.

"This has got to be cleared up, and cleared up quick," he was telling gentle old Superintendent Laystall as we entered the general office. "Who the devil said that woman was to be in charge?"

"I said so." Mrs. Pym tramped across the boards, her eyes bleak and her hands deep in her coat pockets. Though she is of middle height, she made Belper look small. "I found the body, and I'm in charge."

"Says who?" Belper wanted to know. "You haven't got your superior officer's permission, and the Council won't stand for it."

"The Council can lump it. Police procedure —"

"Police fiddlesticks!" Belper looked as if he would dance with rage. "This is a serious matter. I'm not going to —"

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"No?" Her strong mouth became a thin line; I felt for Belper when her hands went on her hips. "Mr. Belper, I am a properly constituted law enforcement officer. I was there when the body of Klara Dimmick was found, and as a ranking C.I.D. detective I'm taking charge." She moved forward. Belper skipped towards Laystall, who was trying not to smile. "I don't give a minor hoot in hades for the S.M.C. I'm handling this case until I'm officially taken off it. You're chairman of the Council, but in this office at this time you're an ordinary citizen. Take it or leave it."

"I'll take it. I'll call a meeting tomorrow and have you thrown out." Belper was livid. "I opposed your appointment in the first place, and I'm not going to stand for this!" He stormed towards the door, ridiculously like a cockerel. But he came to a halt and we saw his ears become bright red as Mrs. Pym said mildly:

"If you want to borrow my car, you may. You'll never get a taxi to Nadja Sherbina's little flat in Jessfield Park at this time of morning."

Belper went out quietly. Even Laystall laughed, later in the day, when we heard Belper had gone upcountry on urgent business for a week. But now the superintendent was not laughing.

"Mrs. Pym, you know that's no way to behave."

"No, sir? We girls get our tantrums." Her bleak eyes dared him to laugh at the feeble jest. "What about Klara?"

"Dr. Swann has seen the coroner and he'll be at work in the hour. We agreed on that, rather than wait till a more reasonable hour."

"What about identification, sir?"

"Her Number One boy is coming down. I spoke to Dimmick. He's upset — and you can't blame him. He thought the world of her. By the way, what were you doing in the French Concession?"

"Our friend here," Mrs. Pym waved to me without hesitation, "is a journalist and wanted to interview Dimmick. The least I could do was give him a lift." She nodded as if pleased. "I'm not officially on duty."

"Aren't you?" Laystall was surprised. "I thought —"

"According to Belper, we don't think, sir, we're S.M.C. puppets. However, that's not important. D'you know anything about Klara Dimmick? Had she any lovers, or that sort of thing?"

"Klara Dimmick!" Laystall was shocked. "Good Lord, no! Don't you go asking things like that or there really will be trouble. Why, she gave a thousand dollars to the Police Charity last November."

"Our friend here," she waved to me again, "told me she's the goddess of the Rickshawmen's Mission as well — a spreader of sweetness and light." Her eyes were sardonic. "Where does she get that much money — on Dimmick's pay?"

"He's Number Three man in China Oil," Laystall protested.

"He still wouldn't have that much

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to spare, not in Shanghai with a wife who wears imported Paris models."

"What about asking Stein? She banks with him," I suggested.

Mrs. Pym never wastes time asking how you know things. She got on the 'phone and routed Stein out of bed, which, as president of the New York-Oriental Banking Corporation, he resented.

"I'm sorry to spoil your beauty sleep." She briefly explained what had happened. "I'm asking you, unofficially, to tell me Klara Dimmick's position. Eh? A rich woman, is she?" Mrs. Pym listened and put down the receiver, turning to us. "Worth more than a hundred thousand, he says; usually banks about ten thousand a few times every year, in cash."

I whistled. "Smelly?"

Laystall was offended.

"I don't think you should talk like that about her."

Mrs. Pym shrugged.

"Superintendent, you've got a nice mind; I haven't. True virtue, as our native friends insist, shelters behind a polite palm: a parade of good works is intended to distract the eye from other, less virtuous, things."

There was nothing more to be done then. Mrs. Pym ran me home to my digs in Yangtzepoo, telling me I could tag along with her if I was at her flat not later than eight thirty — that meant turning in my story early. I didn't mind.

"It looks good," I said, climbing out of the Bugatti into the chill, faintly hot-oil-and-garlic atmosphere which is pure Shanghai background. "As a rule, you don't get out-and-out thrillers in China."

Mrs. Pym wrinkled her nose.

"Go to bed and dream, or do a little research, son. Shinaingan was writing first-class thrillers here — with fingerprints and all — when Edgar Allan Poe's ancestors were being seasick on the *Mayflower*. Night."

Mrs. Pym's office was a small room at the top of police headquarters from which, if she felt like looking, she had a nice view of the S.M.C. building. Enthroned behind her neat, ancient desk, she permitted me to stay on the condition I took notes and kept my mouth shut. Her net had been cast ruthlessly, and before me was a list:

Johnnie Thrane
Elise Sartoris
Benjamin Cudworth
Lily Rogers
Ernest Dimmick
Fu Chwang
Dr. Swann
Morris Stein

The system of interviewing them was equally ruthless. Johnnie Thrane was first, and when he sat down it was as if a breath of Bond Street had entered the drab office.

"Mr. Thrane, you will have seen the morning papers. I want you to tell me what happened last night."

Thrane bowed.

"There is so little to say, dear lady. Mrs. Dimmick, Mrs. Sartoris, Mrs. Rogers, Mr. Cudworth, and myself

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were a small dinner-party. We dined at the Palace and reached the Astor House just before nine."

"You were in evening dress?"

"But naturally!" Thrane was shocked. "It was a most formal affair."

"I know my manners, too. Okay, carry on."

"We — ah — did the usual things," Thrane went on in a hurt voice. "At ten Mrs. Dimmick was called to the telephone, and excused herself."

"Why?"

"One of her protégés was ill. The dear lady was a great one for good works. We simply could not induce her to stay, and off she went."

Elise Sartoris, blonde and languid, substantiated the story, and so did the impeccable Lily Rogers, the Settlement's social leader. Little Benjamin Cudworth, who was always broke but whose connections were blue-blooded, added that Mrs. Dimmick had mentioned she would have to "pop home and change."

Ernest Dimmick admitted he had gone over to the French Club to look at the snooker, and must have missed his wife when she came in.

"I'm not surprised to hear 'your story," he told Mrs. Pym during his second interview. "Klara had only two passions in life — her benevolent institutions and the works of Richard Wagner. I am not being disloyal but they were, perhaps, almost more important than our — ah — married life. . . ."

Fu Chwang, his Number One houseboy, admitted that since his master was out, he was out too — an old China custom.

"Master and mississy no have got. My pay talkee my mama."

"What side mama b'long?" Mrs. Pym wanted to know.

"B'long amah, Tracey Terrace-side. My go maybe one hour."

"You saw your mississy?"

Fu Chwang shook his head. "My cousin b'long rickshaw-coolie. Talkee me mississy ride him rickshaw. Catchee house ten o'clock. Catchee diff'runt clothes, then she go."

"What side?"

"Zeh-lok-phoo, Zikawe Creek-side."

"The end of the French Bund at Siccawei Creek?" Mrs. Pym was surprised. "How fashion what thing?"

"No savvy." Fu Chwang shrugged. "Catchee tall blown house that side. My cousin he talkee me mississy pay him small money. He say, no good, fare one dollah Mex. Wanchee big money. Mississy say '*yeu-tse, yeu-tse!*' "

"She'd paid enough, had she?" Mrs. Pym turned to me. "Gave the poor devil dimes, obviously." * She dismissed Fu Chwang when she found that his cousin had not followed Klara Dimmick, after the usual fashion of a swindled coolie.

In the time-honored way of all police surgeons, Swann bustled in as if devils were after him.

* In those days, ten dimes legally equalled a dollar Mex, but local exchange was such that for a silver dollar one could get anything from ten to fourteen dimes in an exchange bureau, or, in copper, up to nearly two hundred pennies.

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"Got an appointment," he announced, leaning heavily on his brown leather work-case placed on the edge of the desk. "The corpse was well nourished and all that. Died of a knife thrust. Dead very few hours when I saw her."

"No exciting news?"

"No. With exposure to cold, then being messed about and brought into hot places — well, how can I give any time?"

"No, I see that."

"Nice of you." Swann nodded cheerfully. "Well-built, full-blooded German wench with years of life in her — her mortal twain was nearly cut and now she's buried in a rut . . . or soon will be." Swann beamed. He was given to those appalling, home-made couplets. Mrs. Pym smiled in a sour manner and sat back to wait for Morris Stein.

He was the most unhelpful of the lot. Private bankers in the Far East, then, had never made up their minds if they equalled God, or a mere archangel. Stein belonged to the former school.

He answered Mrs. Pym's questions guardedly. No, he did not know where she got those sums of regular cash she deposited. They were always in twenties, fifties, and hundreds.

Mrs. Pym glared at him.

"Look here, Stein, I don't give a copper cash if you're the biggest gun in the Settlement — and there isn't one of your lot who wouldn't steal the wool off the Lamb of God, if he got the chance. I want to know where Klara got hold of all that money!"

Stein purpled.

"Mrs. Pym, I'll have you —"

"Oh, bosh. Bankers know everything about their clients. Where did she get it?"

"If I knew, I couldn't reveal professional secrets."

"Professional twiddle! This is a police office and I want your help. Look, friend, shall I tell this lad here — he's a reporter — that you cleared a million running guns up to Mukden for Chang Tso-lin?"

The banker gestured hurriedly.

"Rank libel! I told you I don't know anything. Mrs. Dimmick married an important man. Maybe it wasn't the best of marriages; he's only a runt, after all, and she's a fine woman, or was. There's not a breath of scandal associated with her name."

She let Stein ramble on and dismissed him, ignoring his threats.

"We're nowhere, son," she told me. "Problem is, who killed that lily-white child? I don't believe in whitewash, and, if nothing else, swindling that coolie out of a few dimes convinces me. She's hiding something, and that something is big. Wait a tick." She grabbed the 'phone and talked to Lorrie Bala, head of China Oil.

Lorrie, who was an Armenian, believed in nothing that was not good legal currency.

"Yes, I know about Dimmick," he said. "Klara? A nice woman. Yes. Did lots of good, wasting money, too, on tramps. Happy? Well, you might say,

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but she played him around a bit. He is a frustrated little perisher, but Ernie adored her. I don't think she'd risk a lover, but it puzzles me. You know these — well . . . but I never heard anything wrong about her."

Slightly pink, Mrs. Pym told me the story, adding:

"I just don't get it."

"Maybe she *was* a good woman? Maybe it was robbers, or something?"

"Laid her out in a dinghy and hung flowers on it? Don't be so damn silly. It was a man, and a white man."

"It might've been a woman, surely?"

"It was a man and you're blind if you can't see that. The answer's — hell, I'm slipping! Get a wiggle on — we're going to be busy."

The Bugatti went hurtling through the crowded streets. Mrs. Pym always drives as if she's one minute ahead of death. This time she rounded the Bund corner on two wheels, dodging rickshaws, great barrows with their 'hi-yah'-ing coolies, and cars, with inspired directness. We raced across the French Concession and reached Siccawei Creek in nine minutes flat from police headquarters, which was impossible.

She walked to a gaunt brown house in Zeh-lok-phoo with a little painted sign of a bunch of red poppies over the door. I thought all sorts of things in puzzled wonder.

She spent, she told me, thirty minutes interviewing a stout and unpleasant man named Chow Ling, a typically squat Cantonese. He was not prepared to talk, and once, waiting outside, I heard a muted yell. It worried me. She is never gentle with people who keep their mouths shut when she wants information.

"He wouldn't talk," she explained, when we were haring back to the Settlement. Her eyes were hard. "So I made him."

"How?"

"Proposed to light a little fire on his chest. When that didn't work, he'd spiked my guns. So I found a kitchen knife and made big play that I'd cut off one of his arms." Her eyes were icy. "I'd have been in a hell of a mess if he kept holding out on me! But he talked — there never was a Chinese who'd stand up to the idea of going to his eventual grave with an incomplete body."

"Ah! Did you get anything?"

"What d'you think?"

Superintendent Laystall saw her in his office. He was nice enough to let me be present, on the condition that he saw my story when I'd written it.

Mrs. Pym was cock-a-hoop, even though her face was almost stony.

"Dirty, filthy case, every bit of it." She frowned at me as if she didn't like my being there. "You and your angelic Klara!" She seemed to be addressing the whole of Shanghai. "A cold and frigid woman to that poor little husband of hers, and as moral as an alley cat outside the house!"

Laystall was shocked.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Granted. Do you know what? Klara Dimmick owned Chow Ling's

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calling-house! Yes, my gullible and credulous friends — a brothel! That's where she got the cash."

I was shaken. I knew of Chow Ling's only by hearsay — a discreet, exclusive establishment where all the girls were white and desperately expensive. Its watchword was complete anonymity and, being in the Chinese City, it could not be touched by the law, for it obviously paid plenty of local *cumshaw*.

"She *owned* it?" Laystall was almost incoherent.

"And she was the highest priced article there." Mrs. Pym glowered awfully. She is a nice-minded woman, and I could see that she hated telling this story. "It's all been kept very quiet, very quiet indeed."

When Laystall had recovered he asked another question.

"You've found out who killed her?"

"Easily. I told our friend here it was a man when I saw her coat buttoned up, man-fashion."

"And the man?"

"One of her intimate circle — one of those who, like this whole damned town, thought Klara Dimmick was an angel."

"Yes?"

"What would you do," she asked Laystall in a different voice, "if you brought yourself to go to one of those places, telephoned, ordered the best in the house" — Mrs. Pym frowned heavily — "and then found yourself in the room *with your own wife?*"

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TRAVELING LIGHT

by W. R. BURNETT

JOHNNY ate slowly, relishing the good hot coffee and the combination sandwich. He had intended getting a plain ham sandwich, as he wanted to conserve his money, but the smell of cooking had been too much for him.

The counterman leaned on his elbow and stared past Johnny at the broad macadam highway in the glare of the Arizona winter sun. To the counterman Johnny was just another weary hitchhiker. Hordes of them passed every day; some of them headed for California, some of them headed East. Only one thing about Johnny interested him; he was wearing an old football sweater, and the numeral 7 could still be made out on the faded fabric across his shoulders, though the number itself had been ripped off long ago. The counterman turned from the road to stare languidly at Johnny.

"Come a long way?"

"Only from Ohio," Johnny grinned feebly.

The counterman whistled. "Football sweater you're wearing, ain't it?"

"Yeah. Freshman team at Ohio State."

"Make the varsity?"

"Yeah. I played my sophomore year. Halfback. But my old man ran out of dough."

"Hitting for Southern Cal?"

"Yeah," Johnny answered. "Los Angeles."

"Everybody is."

There was a loud shriek of tires and a big, expensive-looking sedan turned suddenly from the highway and stopped at the filling station with a jerk. Two men got out. One was big and broad-shouldered and redheaded; the other was small and frail-looking with a narrow face and black hair.

"Fill 'er up, Cap," called the big man. "We chow. Back in a minute."

"Boy," said the counterman, "that car's been places. Look at the dust all over it."

The men came in and sat down at the counter. Their well-cut clothes were covered with dust; their eyes were bloodshot and they both looked

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haggard and done in, the small one especially.

"Hey, pal," said the big one, "we want two club sandwiches and a couple o' coffees. And make it fast, will you?"

The counterman went to make the sandwiches. The little man stared at Johnny for a moment; then he leaned forward and whispered something to the redhead, who turned, stared briefly, then said:

"Hiya, kid. Hoofing?"

"Yeah."

"How'd you like to drive a couple guys to El Portal?"

"That's right on my way."

"Okay," said the big man. "Eats, if any, and transportation; maybe a little dough if you give us service. We're in a hurry."

"I'll do my best."

Red smiled.

"Buddy, you'll have to push that hack to hit the road like we want to hit it."

"Yeah," said the little man, "my wife's sick over in El Portal. We got a telegram saying they thought maybe she might kick off, so I want to get there and get there quick."

"I'm sorry," said Johnny. "I'm not afraid to open a car up."

"Good," said the big man. "Let's get acquainted. Call me Red; that's practically the only name I got. My skinny friend here is George. What's your name?"

"Johnny."

"Okay, Johnny. As soon as we chow we start."

The counterman came with their sandwiches. They wolfed them down, then gulped down their coffee. The counterman watched them with raised eyebrows; never in his life had he seen anybody eat so fast. They got up. Red threw a dollar on the counter.

"Okay?" he asked.

"You got some change coming."

"Keep it. Go out to a good restaurant and get your lunch."

The two men walked so fast Johnny could hardly keep up with them.

Red paid for the gasoline, then he and George got into the back seat. Johnny jumped in and started the motor with a roar; this was a real hack; he hadn't driven one like it since his freshman year in college, when the real estate business was good and his dad was in the big money.

The counterman was standing in the door of the barbecue joint when Johnny drove past.

"Luck, eh?" he called.

"You tell it," said Johnny.

In a few moments Johnny had left the little Arizona town and the barbecue joint far behind. In the rear-view mirror he could see Red and George, leaning back against the cushions, their hats over their eyes, their legs stretched out. Those two birds were certainly worn out, all right; they were already half asleep.

Once Red sat up suddenly and, leaning forward, looked at the dashboard.

"Atta stuff, buddy," he said.

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"George was right about you. He said you looked like you wasn't scared of no blowout. Don't worry. These tires are good. Keep moving."

Johnny nodded and Red lay back. They passed through some Mexican villages and Johnny slowed down. At several places they saw Indian hogans with fat squaws sitting in front of them. There were no towns in this desolate region: only a handful of Mexicans and Indians lost in this gigantic flat valley, hemmed in by gigantic lavender mountains.

For some reason traffic was very light on this national highway and when Johnny saw a car running slowly ahead of him he slackened his pace a little, then gradually slowed down almost to a stop. George didn't miss a beat in his snoring, but Red sat up at once.

"Keep moving," he said harshly.

But Johnny pointed. A girl hitchhiker in brown slacks and a green sweater was struggling with two men who were trying to pull her into their car. A third man was inching the car along, keeping up with them as the girl pushed her way forward, trying to get away.

"She's doing all right," said Red. "A little ride will do her good. Keep moving."

"No," said Johnny, jamming on the brakes. "I won't keep moving." He turned and looked straight into Red's chill gray eyes. He saw Red clench his fists; he saw the huge muscles rippling under his coat sleeve, but he wasn't intimidated. That girl needed help and she was going to get it.

"Okay," said Red wearily, turning away. Then he grinned and said: "It's your party, Johnny, old sock. Let's see you go to work."

Johnny jumped out of the car and ran toward the struggling girl. The men let loose of her when they saw Johnny coming, and one of them drew back his fist.

"Stay out of this, partner, if you know what's good for you," said one of them. "This is my gal and she's trying to beat it."

Johnny hesitated. The men looked tough. The girl didn't; quite the contrary. She reminded him of some of the girls he had gone to school with back in Ohio.

"What about it, sister?" he demanded.

"I never saw these men before."

"It's a lie."

"Okay," said Johnny. "You guys leave this girl alone. Beat it."

"Sez you!" said the man in the car.

The two men, who had been struggling with the girl, jumped Johnny. One of them hit him behind the ear and turned him half around; the other kicked him hard three times. In a moment one of them hit him on the jaw and he went down. But he was boiling now and came up fighting. The third man jumped from the car and got into the fight. Johnny had never seen so many fists before in his life, but finally he landed a good solid blow and one of the men moved out of the fight, holding his stomach.

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Johnny went down again. Dazed, he sat looking up at the blazing blue sky. Much to his surprise, Red, with a broad grin on his freckled face, moved into his line of vision.

"You ain't doing so good, Johnny," he said. Then he turned to the two men who were waiting for Johnny to get up: "Now, now; you boys are getting too rough. Mustn't play rough." Then he threw back his head and laughed.

The men looked at each other uneasily. This redheaded guy was big as an ox and looked plenty tough.

"You, baby," said Red, turning to the girl, "give us the lowdown quick. Family affair?"

"I never saw these men before."

"Wouldn't like to go by-by with 'em?"

"Of course not."

"No use, boys. Get in your kiddie car and shove off."

"Sez you," one of the men said feebly.

Suddenly Red reached out and, taking the men by their coat collars, jammed their faces together. They both staggered back, dazed.

"Sez me."

The man who had been hit in the stomach was already sitting at the wheel; the other two climbed in beside him groggily. The car moved off.

Johnny was still a little dazed; he stood rubbing his jaw. The girl came over to him and put her hand on his arm.

"Thanks. I'm glad you came along."

"Don't mention it."

Red looked on, smiling sardonically; then he said:

"Sister, we're going as far as El Portal and we're going fast. Hop in, we ain't got all night."

"Well, I . . ." She looked at Johnny for a long time, then she said: "All right."

When they got back to the car, Johnny held the door open for her.

"Wouldn't like to ride back here with old Red, would you?" Red demanded.

The girl said nothing. She didn't know just what to say. She climbed in with Johnny.

Johnny drove in silence for a long time. In a few minutes he picked up the car with the three men in it and went past them blowing the horn. The girl glanced at the speedometer. It read 76.

"Do you have to drive that fast?" she demanded.

"Yes," said Johnny. "The little one's wife is very sick. Afraid she'll die. She's in El Portal."

"The little one?" She turned to look. "That's a funny way to . . . aren't these men friends of yours?"

"No. I'm hitchhiking to sunny Cal. I'm just the chauffeur. They drove all night and are worn out."

She turned again and Red grinned at her.

"I didn't thank you," she said. "Thanks."

"Just routine," said Red. "I always go round fighting over dames. Or else they're fighting over me. You know

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how it is. Like to come back here?"

"Nix," said George. "Let the kid alone."

"Can't I have any fun?"

"You just had your fun. Beating up guys is your fun." George groaned and lay back. "I'm tired! Only clucks use their fists. You always was a cluck, Red."

Red yawned and, lying back, put his hat over his eyes.

There was a long silence. The monotonous, burned country rushed past. Suddenly the girl leaned forward and began to cry.

"Excuse me," she said, "but I've had about all I can stand. I hitched from Texas. It's my first time. I never had any idea things would be so bad."

Johnny patted her on the shoulder. She tried to stifle her sobs. Red leaned forward.

"Johnny," he cried, "let that girl alone. Where was you brung up? Look at the state you got her in."

Johnny turned slightly.

"Listen . . . I. . . ."

Red burst out laughing, delighted, then he leaned back and put his hat over his face.

"What a man!" said Johnny, shaking his head. To the girl, who was calmer now: "Going far?"

"El Portal."

"That's where we're going."

"I know. I could hardly believe my ears."

"Live there?"

"Yes. My boy friend lives there, too. He's a lawyer, trying to get a start."

"It's tough now for anybody to get a start."

"We were going to get married but we had a row. I wanted to go to work. He wasn't making enough for us to get married on. Oh, we had a beautiful row, and I ran away."

Johnny turned to look at her.

"Yeah? You wanted to go to work and he wouldn't let you? I'd like to see that guy."

"He wins. I give up," said the girl, smiling slightly. "But I'll never let him know what a time I've had."

Turning, Johnny glanced out of the corner of his eye at the girl. She was mighty pretty with her wavy light brown hair, her blue eyes, and her clear-cut, refined face. He began to envy the lawyer.

They were nearing the California line now and were getting into a true desert region. Great drifts of sand rose on either side of them; they went for miles at a time without seeing any vegetation. It was early afternoon and the sun was beating down with almost summer intensity.

George was sleeping peacefully, but Red had had a good rest, he said, although he had seemed to sleep but little, and was sitting up with his legs crossed, smoking a cigarette and whistling.

From time to time the girl looked out across the mile after mile of dazzling wasteland, which stretched unbroken to the enormous lavender mountains to the north. Finally she shuddered:

"What an idiot I was to think I

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could hike through this place. It's awful."

"Pretty bad," said Johnny, nodding.

"It gives me the creeps. There ought to be a law."

"Too many laws now," said Red, leaning forward. "You never know when you're going to break one. Eh, baby?"

"My name's Edna," said the girl. "I don't like to be called 'baby.' "

"Don't you, baby? That's tough, baby. I always call my babies baby."

The girl turned and looked straight into Red's eyes.

"Why don't you be nice?"

Red lowered his head and made his shoulders shake.

"George," he said, punching his companion, "she's appealing to my better nature. Now that touches me. . . . Say, Johnny, what're we making?"

"Little over sixty."

"Slow down till this copper goes past."

Johnny saw a motorcycle cop coming toward them from the opposite direction. He slowed the car gradually. Glancing into the rear-view mirror, he saw that George was sitting up, alert now; Red's face was hard and menacing. The cop looked at them sharply as they passed him.

"He's turning," said Red. "Outrun him, Johnny."

"They sting you here for speeding," said Johnny.

"You're feeling so good, Red," George sneered. "Take the wheel."

"No time," said Red, leaning forward. "Outrun him, kid. You heard me. Fifty bucks if you outrun him."

"That's different."

Johnny pushed the accelerator to the floorboard and the car shot away, roaring over the black macadam.

The girl touched his arm.

"Do you think? . . ."

"Right now for fifty bucks I'd climb a tree in this hack."

"Now you're talking," said Red. "Give her the gun, boy."

Mile after mile the cop trailed them; there'd be a dip in the road and they'd lose him, but when they got on the flat again, there he'd be. The strain was beginning to tell on Johnny; little pains began to run up and down his back and his accelerator foot was numb and he could feel the heat of the engine through his shoe.

"Curve," cried Red. "He's gaining a little. We may lose him here."

Just as Red spoke, the cop's motorcycle began to wobble; he had either blown a tire or had hit a stone in the road; the motorcycle slewed round, then rolled end over end, throwing the cop in a long arc over into the mesquite.

"Yow!" yelled Red. "A nose dive. Nice work, Johnny."

"But, good heavens . . ." the girl began. Johnny nudged her with his elbow. He knew they were in a spot. Red and George were real bad ones; he was sure of it now.

"Keep her moving," said Red. "We shook that rat off but he might get up."

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Johnny glanced at the girl. He could see that she was very nervous. He laughed to cover up, and said the first thing that came into his head:

"That boy friend of yours expecting you?"

The girl started.

"No. It's a surprise. He thinks I'm still in Dallas."

"Oh, just a little surprise. Well, we'll soon be in. I wish you luck."

"Thanks. Going to stay in El Portal a while?"

"Maybe I'll stay the night. I've got to get on to Los Angeles."

"Good luck to you, too."

"Thanks."

They were close to El Portal now. The girl saw the familiar ragged line of hills to the north and smiled. They had left the desert and the lavender mountains behind.

George said: "All right, Red. You take the wheel — we're getting in close."

Johnny slowed down as they passed through a little village on the outskirts. Red started over the seat and Johnny, still holding the wheel and keeping his foot on the accelerator, moved over out of his way. The girl made room for them.

Just as Red took the wheel, they heard the roar of motors. Turning, Johnny saw a couple of squad cars skidding into the main highway from a side road.

"It's a trap," yelled George. "Give her the gun, Red."

The girl screamed. George was knocking the glass out of the back window with the butt of an automatic. Gasping, Johnny pushed the girl into a kneeling position on the floor.

"Stay there, honey," he cried. "We're in for it."

They were getting into the suburbs. Cars swerved to the side of the road as the huge sedan bore down on them at eighty miles an hour. Red had his jaw set and the accelerator to the floorboard; with a slight twist of the wheel he miraculously avoided car after car. Behind them the sirens were going full blast.

George pulled up the back seat and took out a sub-machine gun; then, kneeling, he poked it through the back window.

"Where does this next road go, baby?" yelled Red, reaching down and slapping the girl.

She looked up.

"I . . ."

"You're a great help. If we don't get off this main highway we'll be right in the center of town."

The girl looked over the car door.

"Turn right, next road," she said. "It's a straight shoot to San Diego."

"Atta girl."

Scarcely slacking speed, Red whipped the car around in a wide turn; the tires shrieked wildly and the car careened and skidded, but righted itself. George was thrown violently to the floor.

"Call your shots, you lug!" he cried, getting up groggily.

Looking back, Johnny saw one of the squad cars go over as it tried to

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make the turn, saw a man thrown clear and into a field at the side of the road. But the second car came on. George began to fire out the back window with the machine gun.

"Guy shooting with a rifle," said George calmly.

A bullet whined past them, then another. Suddenly they heard a loud metallic ping; then there was a terrific explosion.

"Good night," said George. "Church is out."

The man with the long-range rifle had hit a rear tire. The car turned half around, careened wildly, then jumped the road and rolled over into a field.

When Johnny came to they were carrying him into the county jail on a stretcher. Looking up, he saw Red, handcuffed, walking beside him. Red grinned.

"Nice party, eh?"

Johnny saw the stern faces of the deputy sheriffs. An old man with a tobacco-stained mustache was staring down at him.

"Okay, sonny?" he asked, smiling.

"I guess so. Where's the girl?"

"They just took her in. What she's doing with you, I don't know. She used to be a mighty nice girl. Knew her father."

Johnny sat up.

"Listen here . . ."

"Never mind, son," said the sheriff. "It'll all come out later."

Red and Johnny had been put into the first cell in the corridor and, pressing their faces against the bars, they could see what was going on in the sheriff's office at the front of the jail. George was in the cell next to them. Beyond George was the tank, where some drunks were shouting and laughing. The girl had been put into a cell at the far end of the L-shaped cell block and they could not see her.

The sheriff's office was jammed all afternoon: lawyers, deputies, city officials of all kinds, newspapermen and photographers milled about, and there was so much noise that George got up from time to time and yelled to them to be quiet, as he was trying to rest.

The cell block was not partitioned off from the sheriff's office but was a continuation with a low railing dividing it from the front hallway. All afternoon men crowded to the railing to stare in at the famous bank robbers: Red Hammond and George (Gloomy) Cooke.

Johnny sat on his bunk, staring at the floor.

"Red," he said, "why don't they let the girl and me go? You told them all about us."

"Fat chance," said Red. "They're all scared. Two to one you both stand trial. 'Course I'll testify for you; I like to testify. So will George and he can make any prosecuting attorney look like a deuce. He's smart, that guy. You'll get off, don't worry. But you may stand trial."

"I'm surprised the girl's boy friend hasn't turned up."

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"How'd you like it, if she was your girl, not knowing all the facts?"

Johnny said nothing.

Red turned from the bars and came over to the bunk.

"What's up?" asked Johnny.

"Nothing. I thought it was the chief of police again. It's just one of the process servers. Didn't you get a bang out of that chief of police? Boy, we got friends in this place. All the big shots want us to come and stay with them. The chief sure would've liked to get us in his new escape-proof jail. Boy, didn't the old whittler swell up, though? We was his prisoners. Hot-cha!"

"Pipe down, Red," called George.

"Okay." Red sat down and lit a cigarette.

"That sheriff's all right," said Johnny. "He doesn't treat you like you were dirt, like all the others."

"No, he's friendly," said Red with a laugh; then he added: "God bless his dear old heart of gold."

Johnny said nothing.

"I told you to pipe down. That mouth of yours will get you in trouble some day," called George.

Red jumped up.

"Look here —" he said.

A matron was coming down the corridor with the girl. Johnny ran up to the front of the cell. He saw a tall, thin, light-haired young man standing at the railing, waiting for the girl.

"Her boy friend," said Johnny.

"I lose," said Red.

The girl turned and smiled wanly at Johnny. Then she went up to the young man. His face was stern. He began shouting at her. She started back, bewildered, then lowered her head. Johnny and Red strained their ears, trying to hear. From time to time they caught a phrase: ". . . You weren't satisfied to stay here . . . all the way to Texas . . . mixed up with gangsters . . . what will everybody say? . . . how do I know you were hitchhiking . . . getting in with three strange men . . . I'd have sent you the money . . . no, I can't help you now . . . you asked for it, now you've got it . . . disgracing all my people . . ."

Red laughed and shouted:

"What a baboon you turned out to be! Say, that gal's on the square."

"Some of your friends, I see," said the young man, then he turned and went out.

The girl followed the matron back along the corridor.

"Stiff upper lip," Johnny called after her.

"You got yourself a girl," said Red. "Right on the good old bounce. See? She's right in your lap."

Johnny sat down on the bunk. He felt better now, much better. After a while without realizing it, he began to whistle.

After they had eaten and the turnkey had taken the tin plates away, the sheriff came down the corridor and stopped before the first cell.

"How you doing, boys?" he asked, smiling at them. He had his coat off, as it was a rather hot evening, and

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they saw that he had a big revolver in a shoulder holster in addition to the automatic on his hip.

"Two-gun man, eh, sheriff?" said Red, grinning.

"Used to be," the sheriff replied. "I can remember the days of the gun-fanners. Well, boys, sleep tight. Food okay? We aim to please."

They saw him go into the front part of the jail, where his office was, and sit down at his desk. Near him a clerk was working at a typewriter, painfully typing a letter with one finger. A new turnkey came on duty and sat for a while on the sheriff's desk, talking to him, then disappeared.

George had been looking out the window of his cell ever since he had eaten.

"What's up?" Red demanded.

"Squad car cruising this district. Sort of making regular rounds. The chief of police's not taking any chances, I guess. Time is it?"

Red pressed his face against the bars and stared out into the front office.

"Ten after six."

Johnny watched them. They seemed excited. He was almost certain they were up to something; what, he couldn't imagine. Of course Red had boasted that they had friends in El Portal, but Johnny thought that he might be joking. After all, "friends," if any, don't storm jails. But why had they been in such a hurry to get to El Portal? Were they running away from something or toward it? Johnny watched, while Red walked back and forth slowly.

"How many left now?" George asked suddenly.

"Three," said Red, "but the clerk don't count and I can't see the turnkey."

There was a long silence, then Red gave a jump and whispered:

"Okay, George."

Pressing his face against the bars, Johnny saw three well-dressed men walk quickly into the jail. The sheriff, who had been reading a newspaper, jumped up. But the men were already holding guns on him. A dapper little man in a tight blue suit seemed to be the leader.

"Well, Buffalo Bill," he said, "stick up your paws. Reach for the ceiling."

The sheriff stood with his mouth open, his hands shaking.

"Where are you, boys?" yelled one of the men.

"Right back here," yelled Red. "Get the turnkey." In his excitement Red began to rattle the cell door. He had forgotten all about Johnny, who still had his face pressed to the bars.

"Where is he?"

"Look around for him. He can't be far."

The man in the blue suit shouted at the sheriff: "Where's the turnkey?"

"Don't know."

"Remember quick."

Johnny held his breath.

"I won't tell you."

"Look for him, look for him," cried Red.

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The man in the blue suit hit the sheriff over the head with the barrel of his revolver, and when the sheriff didn't fall, he hit him again.

Johnny gritted his teeth.

Staggering, the sheriff went for his gun. A man in a brown suit jumped forward suddenly and hit the sheriff in the mouth with his fist. The sheriff fell back into his chair. In spite of his bravado, you could see that he was a very old man; his hat had fallen off and his sparse gray hair was standing up all over his head. The man in the brown suit disarmed him, then leaned forward and hit him again with his fist.

"Talk, you old goat!"

But the man in the blue suit shouted:

"There's the turnkey."

Johnny heard the turnkey cry out.

Then he saw two of the men pulling him up the corridor. The clerk had fainted and had fallen forward across his desk, upsetting an inkwell. Johnny saw the ink dripping to the floor.

The turnkey, pale as death, goaded by the visitors, who were nervous now, fumblingly unlocked the door of Red's cell, then George's. Red leaped out into the corridor. The man in the blue suit handed Red an automatic, then turned and hit the turnkey over the head with the barrel of his revolver. The turnkey fell limp. George grabbed a Thompson gun from one of the men and they all started down the corridor. The man in the blue suit turned.

"What about this monkey?" he demanded, jerking his thumb at Johnny.

"Don't pay no attention to him," cried Red, "he's a softie. Let's get going."

Johnny stood at the door of the cell, not knowing what to do. He was trembling with excitement and rage. Those dirty, lowdown brutes, treating a nice old guy like that; it was just ignorance and viciousness; absolutely unnecessary; they could have managed the jailbreak much better with a little less violence.

The man in the brown suit amused himself by slapping the sheriff's face several times very hard. Johnny saw the old man recoil; his nose began to bleed. Johnny lost his head. Rushing down the corridor, he tackled George from behind, and when they fell, he grabbed George's machine gun and got to his knees. George was knocked out by the fall onto the cement floor and lay groaning.

"Beat it," yelled the man in the blue suit. "Ain't that a siren I hear?"

Red glanced at George, then he fired twice at Johnny, two snap shots that went wide. The machine gun cut loose in Johnny's hands. Scared half to death, and amazed by the violent recoil of the gun, Johnny tried to stop it; he was firing high, spattering lead all over the walls and ceiling of the jail. The men ran out, shouting. Red turned and fired again, missing; then he ran out. The gun slipped from Johnny's grasp, kicked him in the stomach, knocking him over; then it subsided.

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He heard the screaming of sirens and the roar of a powerful motor on the getaway, then he got groggily to his feet and walked over to the sheriff.

"Are you all right?" he cried.

"Well," said the sheriff, trying to smile, "I wouldn't go as far as to say that, but I'm still here."

The judge leaned forward and looked at Johnny and the girl, who were a little nervous and kept glancing at each other. The judge was a young man with the face of a humorist.

"Case dismissed," he said, then he shook his finger at them. "Now I could say, let this be a lesson to you. But I know it won't. Nothing is ever a lesson to anybody, and if that sounds like philosophy, make the most of it. It was a mighty nice thing you did, standing up for old Jim Hughes, but why couldn't you have used a revolver! It's going to cost us five hundred dollars to fix up that jail and we may take it out of your share of the reward."

A bailiff turned to the sheriff and winked, then they both burst out laughing.

"Order in the court," said the judge. "Another thing, if Jim Hughes was a Democrat I'd like him better, but I guess he just got started wrong. As I said before, case dismissed."

"Thanks, your Honor," said Johnny, grinning.

The sheriff got between Johnny and the girl and put his arms around them.

"Don't suppose you want to go over and see your friends in the new city jail, eh?" He laughed, then he groaned and rubbed his jaw. "That one fellow surely had a hard hand. Must have done some honest work before he started using a gun. You kids come and have lunch with me and the missus. She wants to meet you. How about it?"

"Well," said Johnny, "I've got to see a fellow first."

"What fellow?" asked the girl.

"Why," said Johnny, "that boy friend of yours. I feel like I'm responsible for getting you in this jam, so I thought I would —"

"Going to ask him to take me back?"

"Well, I thought . . ."

The sheriff stood looking at them, smiling slightly.

"What an idiot you are!" said the girl, then she turned to the sheriff. "Yes, we'll come for lunch."

Watch EQ on TV

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We quote from the dust jacket of Rufus King's DIAGNOSIS: MURDER, *first published in the United States in 1941:* "[*This book*] *introduces Colin Starr, a young physician whose medical knowledge enables him to detect murder where a less able doctor would have signed a certificate of death from natural causes. Because of his shrewd understanding of human psychology, as well as his application of scientific knowledge to seemingly unrelated facts, Dr. Starr is able to solve*" *mysteries that do not appear to be mysteries at all.*

Here is one of the good doctor's cases which was written after the publication of DIAGNOSIS: MURDER, *and therefore not included in that excellent collection of stories . . .*

THE CASE OF THE PECULIAR PRECAUTIONS

by RUFUS KING

DOCTOR COLIN STARR felt queer toward the end of his address. It was funny how the faces (white, closely packed dots like those on a spread his mother once had made) changed through some inner alchemy from old and middle-aged to the feel of the youth — and he was cumbersome in ill-fitting khaki with his head full of trumpet-calls and proud whipping flags. He hoped that the local U.S.O. drive would go over well. He hoped he hadn't hurt the works by being frank, by saying: "Our boys who return here for their leaves will be few; and if we have this United Service Organization Club for them, I think they will recognize it for what it is — a gesture. But they'll know it is a gesture from our hearts."

He left the Lyric Theater where the rally had been held and walked through hot summer sunlight and under the shade of elm trees to his car. The main business street of Laurel Falls was clearing to its noonday quiet while people did atrocious things to their digestions at counters, tables, and in their homes. He was hungry, and hoped that his own lunch would be delightfully indigestible too.

His driveway was happily empty of cars, and he crossed a broad veranda and went into the cool spaces of a dim, paneled hall. Miss Wadsworth, his secretary, was equally cool, and brisk.

"How did the rally go, Doctor?"

"All right, I guess."

"Mrs. Bernstoffer telephoned with her usual Saturday afternoon vague

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stuffy feeling in her head. This week she feels light and as though she were floating. I talked with her for quite a while. That's all she wanted, poor thing."

"I know. Does she want me to call?"

"No; I persuaded her to wait until Monday."

"Thank you."

"A Mr. Walter O'Derry telephoned. He's the district attorney at Wicherton." (Wicherton was a neighboring Ohio town and lay fifty miles up the Onega River from Laurel Falls.) "I suggested he phone again at one-thirty. That will give you time for your lunch."

"What did he want?"

"He wouldn't say. He said it was personal. There was something strained about his voice, like an incipient laryngitis. He did say he was a good friend of District Attorney Hefferfield, and that he knew how helpful you had been to *him*, in his career, and so he had presumed; and right then his voice faded entirely and he mumbled something containing a definite one-thirty and hung up. It will probably be something dismal."

"It probably will. What's for lunch?"

"Chicken liver omelet and hot raised biscuits. You know what they'll do to you."

"I certainly do. Bless them!"

The early afternoon edition of the *County Chronicle* was beside his plate and he accepted Eulalia's verdict that the picture of himself on its front page over the U.S.O. story was truly a hateful sin. He had rather liked the original itself as being dignified and yet not stuffy, but some defect in the rollers, or whatever they were, had smudged an eye and had given his expression the suggestive cast of a positive old rip.

Headlines over a Wicherton dateline covered a stop-press box. The story was stripped to essentials. The body of David Richerby, retired judge, had been found in the garden of his (quote) handsomely mansioned estate (close quote) at ten-thirty that morning. His head had been beaten in, and this had led to the conclusion that the old gentleman had been murdered. Chief of Police Roger Lutton predicted an arrest before nightfall in spite of the extraordinary circumstances (not given) of the crime.

Starr noted no mention of Wicherton's District Attorney O'Derry who had telephoned so laryngitically before lunch. He knew David Richerby both by repute and from one irritatingly amusing professional visit of two years back. The old gentleman had been a caustically brilliant and harshly just jurist, and had retired from the bench several years ago at sixty. His acidulous wit was reputed to have discouraged any genuine friendships, and his decisions handed down from the bench had resulted in making a good many bitter enemies.

Starr took a fourth biscuit, knowing very well just what it would do to him, and was saved from eating it

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by Miss Wadsworth. Mr. O'Derry, she announced, had not waited to telephone. He had driven down to Laurel Falls from Wicherton and was here — in the library, to be specific. His hair was red, she added.

O'Derry's hair was red, not wild Irish red but deeper and more tamed, and it covered an earnest, inspired Celtic face with a good broad mouth that needed curbs for humor. He started right in with an extravagance of blarney that would have been outrageous had O'Derry not felt it absolutely sincere. Tom Hefferfield had suggested, he said, that he get in touch with Starr. Tom, the State of Ohio, the East, and O'Derry himself were aware of the uncanny brilliance with which Starr had probed out the pellets of truth in so many befogged cases of murder, and by doing so, had helped Hefferfield in Hefferfield's climb to the top of the political tree.

Starr suffered this preliminary lacquer-work while feeling his face warm up to a par with O'Derry's hair. He thought: "Heaven help us, he means it! He must be very young. I'll do whatever he wants, of course. Like all middle-aged relics, I'm a pushover for this sort of stuff."

Not only would Chief Lutton be honored at having Starr consult with O'Derry about the case, but the greatest luck (except for Horrick) lay in Medical Examiner Horrick being ill. Horrick, too, would be honored if Starr would consent to take over the post-mortem. O'Derry, Starr felt, steamed this up a little. And in back of all this honoring lay a frankly inferred hope that if O'Derry broke the case through Starr's suggestions, a tree such as Hefferfield's might be in line for O'Derry, too. . . .

O'Derry drove at an orderly fifty miles an hour. He gave Starr fuller details as the river road slid by.

He said: "Everything about this murder is an outrage to your common sense. It's an outrage because the general flavor of it carries you back twenty or thirty years to the old buzz-saw melodramas and testy squires. Did you ever meet the old gentleman?"

Starr hadn't in the verbal rush had a chance to say so. He said: "I saw Richerby just once, and that was two years ago. He sent for me professionally, and my secretary gathered from the phone call that he was at least *in extremis*. I drove to Wicherton at breakneck speed and discovered his imaginary ailment to be a malignant and totally personal version of gout. I told him rather plainly that there was nothing the matter with him. He called me a bigot and a poltroon, and had his butler show me the door. I remember that the butler's name was Chalice and it suited him. Straight out of the Middle Ages."

O'Derry hugged a shoulder while a truck whizzed past. "Was Richerby in his wheel-chair period then?" he asked.

"No, but I gathered he was planning one. I think he expected me to prescribe it."

"He got one, all right. It figures technically as the weapon."

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"Oh, look here — those things weigh a ton."

"I know. I warned you the set-up is an outrage. It wasn't the whole wheel-chair, as a matter of fact. It was the metal bar part that operates the brake. This had been unbolted and removed, and then was used to crush his head in. A test showed it takes at least ten minutes to get that brake-bar off, and all the while the old gentleman must have been sitting in the other chair surrounded by his astonishing precautions, and watching his murderer work!"

"What other chair? What precautions?"

"He was killed in the center of an open space in his garden. It's the part surrounded by those delphiniums the place is famous for. They're about eleven feet tall."

"I saw them."

"His wheel-chair was there, and a garden-chair, and a garden-table. On the table was one of those new contraptions for two-way communication by radio-telephony. It's a small box of an instrument, and I understand its transmitting range is only a thousand feet or so, but Richerby could talk and be heard through several corresponding sets in the servants' quarters and other rooms in the house."

"I thought those things had to be plugged in?"

"They do. He had had an underground connection arranged. The point is, all Richerby had to do was to reach out and flip a switch and call for help, to have his daughter or his cousin or that octogenarian lizard of a butler you spoke about come running. Then there was a loaded revolver in the garden-table drawer, also within easy reach of Richerby; but then comes the odd thing."

"What thing?"

"He had had an electrically charged wire installed along the top of the estate's fencing."

"I was sure that sort of thing vanished with prohibition. Is it a lethal voltage?"

"No, but it's strong enough to give a good shock and a burn. It's arranged to ring warning gongs if the circuit is touched or broken. The fence itself is that French provincial type of closely woven cedar stakes somewhat over four feet high. Visitors and tradesmen are passed in by a man at the gate lodge, who cuts the current off and turns it on again."

"It seems to narrow down to the murderer having been on terms of welcome intimacy."

"So the boys think." O'Derry slowed to sedate leisure for passing through a village. "Their dope is that Richerby was seated sunning himself in the wheel-chair and reading one of those indigestibly intellectual Meredith novels when this guy comes along. The book was lying open on the table. Then they think the talk turned to the wheel-chair."

"Why?"

"They figure that Richerby must have said something about the brake needing adjustment, and that this guy offered to fix it."

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"Taking, presumably, a complete tool-kit from his pocket?"

"No, a small wrench could do the job. There wasn't any wrench around. It's one of the minor mysteries. Anyhow, the guy helped Richerby into the garden-chair and set to work, all the while on the most peaceful sort of terms with the old fellow. Then as soon as the bar was loose, he used it to beat Richerby's head in. You can see the pattern of the bar's lower end in some of the bruises."

"It sounds like a sudden homicidal rage."

"The boys are satisfied about that, and about its having been an inside job. Richerby didn't use either the radio gadget to call for help or the revolver to defend himself, although he had plenty of time to do both. They wash out any intruder theory, because the gates weren't opened from after breakfast on, and the charged circuit along the fencing was in working order and no alarm gongs went off. The butler found the old gentleman just after ten-thirty, slumped in the garden-chair, dead."

"Who do they think did it?"

"They've picked the entire field — the daughter, the cousin and the butler. The rest of the servants are having their day off, and there aren't any house guests."

"Who's the favorite?"

"They run about even."

"Those elaborate safeguards Richerby took seem to have been against some threat from outside. Do you think he was afraid of reprisals for some stiff sentences he handed down from the bench?"

"That's the town's popular bet at the moment. Only, it doesn't jibe with the job's having been an inside one. The further old-melodrama touches are these: Chalice is the perfect type of butler for that lush, dramatic day — feeble, faithful, seared to a crisp by Richerby's caustic sarcasms, and with a tailor-made motive of being down in the old fellow's will for a bequest of twenty-five thousand dollars. He hasn't an alibi beyond his own word that he was in the pantry cleaning silver from after breakfast on. There's one of the radio-telephone sets in it, and Chalice says the only message borne by Richerby's voice was an uncanny suggestion to be damned careful to get the black out of the grape leaves of the silver candelabra. Chalice told the boys about it in that quavering voice of his, and burst into tears."

"I'm sure they put them down as crocodile."

"No, Murphy made the deduction — Murphy's one of our naturalists — he said they were alligator's. Now about the cousin: Did you meet him that time you were there?"

"No."

"His name is Walter Richerby, and the cousinship is a third one. He's an oversized lump in his forties, and Chalice did dish out the fact in his quiet, moist way that Walter has a passion for reading in bed, which the servants don't mind. But he also has a passion for eating chocolate-covered

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marshmallows while doing so and wiping his fingers on the sheets, which the servants do mind. Walter has no money or prospects whatever, and was dependent on Richerby for everything."

"Walter also was down in the will?"

"Of course he's down in the will. For a hundred thousand. That struck the boys dizzy and had half of them grabbing for Chalice and half for Walter."

"What was Walter's alibi?"

"About as tepid as Chalice's. He said he twisted his ankle on the way upstairs after breakfast, and went to his room to lie down with hot towels on it. He alternated brief naps with reading a thing called 'Confessions of a Vampire' and stoking away a box of chocolate-covered marshmallows. Walter also has a radio-telephone beside the couch and heard nothing from Richerby, beyond the crack about the silver candelabra."

"How did the old gentleman's death affect him?"

"He seemed genuinely pleased. Even the boys were aghast at his making no bones about this pleasure. They've decided he is mad and that his mouthpiece will plead temporary insanity. The daughter's name is Alice."

"I did meet the daughter, briefly."

It had been, Starr remembered, scarcely more than an introduction just before Chalice had been summoned for the exit march to the door. Starr recalled her as a shy young woman with a fragile charm and warm dark eyes that had seemed freighted with many longings.

"This," O'Derry said, "is what we know about her: She was born when Richerby was in his late forties. She is nineteen. Her mother died at Alice's birth, and the old fellow developed an almost human streak about the baby. Reports are — again from Chalice — that Richerby broke his neck being kind and lovable and gentle with her, with the result that Alice adored him."

"Then why suspect her of killing him?"

"Oh, surely, Doctor, you know how the boys are. . . . Love."

"What love?"

"Vibrant, tender young love. Or do I make you ill?"

"Yes."

("He *is* young," Starr thought, "and his job is still an adventure. Something abstract that hasn't been ground deeply into him from years of association. In spite of its contact with the most desperate sort of human tragedies he can still look upon it as a game with sidelights of zestful fun.")

"According to the boys," O'Derry went on, "it is a love that blinded her to her love — different kind of — for her father."

"Aren't you being somewhat unkind? I liked the girl, what I saw of her. And it doesn't make sense."

"Yes, it does. The vibrant love is for young Peter Collidge. Something else to be added to the saga of Judith."

Starr hadn't the slightest idea what O'Derry was alluding to, and said so.

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O'Derry explained at considerable length. Judith Collidge was young Peter Collidge's foster-mother. People saw her mostly, O'Derry said, as a splendid figure of a woman seated side-saddle on a deep-chested roan mare taking daily canters along the bridle-path which edged the Onega River on the outskirts of Wicherton. O'Derry explained that they always said of her to a stranger: "That's Judith Collidge. She does so much."

Then they would go on to amplify, because she was the type of interesting woman in any community who is always talked about a lot, even though people rarely, now, ran into her socially. She was much too busy for that. She had (they would say) done everything since Herbert died two years ago. Herbert had been her husband: a ripe, hearty, fulsome man who had lived life up to the last cent of his not inconsiderable resources. And Judith had been a good companion, as richly earthy as himself, and had gone about socially at a great pace.

O'Derry knew her and the adopted son Peter fairly well. Their place, he said, was south of the town on a hillcrest, and possessed a stream which Judith Collidge had turned into a hatchery for trout. That was just one of the things. A stand of maples was sugared off every spring, and an apiary yielded good honey. Judith worked with the energy of a man, attending to the bulk of the chores herself, and she had done all this so that Peter could finish his schooling and would still have the family estate to own and manage when he would be able to take over.

O'Derry said that this was considered remarkable, too, because of Peter not having been the Collidges' own son. They had adopted him twenty years ago when Judith had been advised that she never could have any children. Peter had been an intense, impressionable boy, devoted to Herbert Collidge and Judith, and had recently passed his physical examination for the draft as a first-class specimen of manhood. Peter, O'Derry ended, was tops.

"I still don't see," Starr said, "any reason why Alice Richerby and Peter Collidge shouldn't be in love. Was the old gentleman the monkey-wrench?"

"It's a point that has the boys puzzled. Chalice says that Richerby was pathetically sweet about the thing. Sort of: 'Your happiness is my only happiness, Alice my dear. By all means marry Peter and leave me to my brief declining years of fear and pain. I'll get along somehow.' Now if that isn't 'East Lynne!' "

"I never saw 'East Lynne,' and I'm sure that you haven't either."

"Well, at least it's of an era. The boys just took it as so much eyewash. Cousin Walter, on the other hand, told them between marshmallows that Richerby had told him that he intended cutting Alice off with a dollar if she married Peter or anybody else before he died. That pleased the boys much better, even though some of the wise ones do feel that

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Walter may have made it up to shove suspicion on Alice and away from himself."

"Walter sounds interesting."

"Walter is superb. You will be hypnotized when you see him. I want you to look at his ankle."

"I'm afraid — I mean, the post-mortem will be all right, but the ankle would fall to their regular physician. Who have they now?"

"Nobody. I'm certain you must be the last poltroon who has crossed the Richerby threshold since he gestured you out. I want your opinion on Walter's ankle to see if he's faking. I'd like him to be guilty, even if he isn't."

Wicherton rose into view — the chimney of a factory, church spires, a town dump, shacks, then business buildings and charming homes.

The entrance gates were open, and the outer-defense wire system shut off when they reached the Richerby place. A couple of the boys were tending goal against the curious, and O'Derry stopped the car for a moment while one of them reported that Chief Lutton and the boys were holding press conferences at headquarters. Nobody, he said, had gone into the estate but Judith and Peter Collidge, both of whom had been telephoned for by Alice Richerby. Both had been on horseback, which was held to be highly sensible, what with horses running perfectly well on hay and needing no gasoline. An additional fashion note disclosed that Peter Collidge wore an artilleryman's uniform and was home for a week on his first leave.

Starr went with O'Derry to the garden and looked at Richerby. There seemed no reason to the pattern of the blows that had beaten on the old gentleman's head. It seemed the job of a person gone momentarily berserk. It was thoroughly unpleasant.

He said to O'Derry: "There's nothing I can do here. Better have the wagon take him to the mortuary."

"Do you agree about the brake-bar being the weapon?"

"Oh, yes. That seems obvious. Let's go look at the ankle."

Festoons of cerise cabbage roses were the *motif* on the wallpaper of Walter Richerby's room. Puce velour draped the windows and ponderous mahogany glowed with a verbena-scented polish. None of it dwarfed Walter. A Mandarin robe (the Mandarin had been outsize) was brilliant with dragons about him as he lay lumpishly on a couch, the "Confessions of a Vampire" open on his second terrace, his fingers sketchily licked free of chocolate, and his left foot and ankle loosely swathed in a tepidly steaming towel.

His reception of Dr. Starr was intelligently languid. Honors were dusted off again. It was an honor to have a man of such noted celebrity interest himself in their trivial affairs. Most gracious of Doctor Starr to have come. He said to O'Derry: "And so thoughtful of you at a time like this to think of me."

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"Does," Starr asked, pressing, "this hurt?"

A sharp yelp was an unequivocal answer.

"Well — really, Doctor!"

"I'll tape it up. There's nothing broken. It will be all right."

O'Derry suggested tentatively: "Wouldn't an X-ray be advisable?"

"No," Starr said. "The swelling and discoloration would show that the twist came early this morning."

Walter's dreamy eyes grew vitally alert.

"I see, gentlemen. I understand. You suspect me of malingering. Isn't it rather stupid of you? I'm sure that Doctor Starr will agree that a sprain of this minor importance wouldn't impede my mobility in the least. I could easily have managed to hobble out into the garden, and do — you know what."

O'Derry said to Starr when they were in the hallway: "There you are. He's so damned sure of himself. And isn't he something?"

They went down gloomy deep-piled stairs to an entrance hall weighted with the baroque, and into a large room walled with great canvases of the genre depicting numerous Arabs charging from nowhere across a desert into nothing. This conceit, Starr noticed, was leavened with the homier numbers popular during the period, showing maidens in party dresses getting buckets out of wells.

Judith Collidge with her skirted riding-habit, hat and braided leather crop blended perfectly into the *mise en scène*. She stood before a hearth that was banked with ferns, and beside her stood Peter Collidge, infernally good-looking and somewhat self-consciously husky in the newness of his artilleryman's uniform.

Alice Richerby sat at a table on which Chalice was quiveringly arranging an impressive service in silver for tea. Starr thought on this second look that his first impression of Alice had been sound. She had matured a little during the past two years and struck him decidedly as a counterpart in wholesome freshness to the handsome virility of Peter Collidge. He thought it absurd to consider her for a moment as being in any way involved with the grim berserk business of her father's beaten head. He thought the two youngsters were just right for each other, and it would be freakishly cruel if this murder of an embittered old man were to keep them apart.

The introductions were pleasant, and subdued, by O'Derry, to that key so consciously considered proper to the tragic quality of the moment. Starr found the atmosphere a refreshing relief after the miasmic effect of Walter. This was as things should be. Judith Collidge tempered her voice to room size (O'Derry had informed Starr that its usual pitch suggested an impending view-halloo at the hunt) and said: "I insisted on tea. Alice needs it. It's strengthening."

They offered a curious front with Judith as its center. Something, Starr thought, like a mother battleship of

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the line with two sturdy youngster cruisers siding it. He accepted a cup, a thin cress sandwich, and the talk turned on the old gentleman.

His reputed quirks, among other things, were recalled by Judith in a manner as if death had endowed them with an especially lovable quality: his refusal to permit any musical instrument to be played excepting an ocarina, into which he himself would blow sadly and make strange tunes of incredible desolation; a ban against tobacco or liquor in any form beyond a flat, pale, bitter ale which he had had imported from England and had ceaselessly importuned Alice and Walter to drink. There was a wealth of such anecdotal quirks which David Richerby had rigidly enforced in his rôle of master of the hearth.

As Judith Collidge talked, the picture grew upon Starr of the sort of man that Richerby must have been: certainly an introvert of the deepest nature with his caustic sarcasms and quirks of petty tyrannies as a constant defence against anyone else gaining entrance into the absorbing fields of his inner self. And how greedily — in secret — Starr considered, was a man of that type possessed with a longing for human affection and companionship. A paradoxical longing that could even find some satisfaction in an outward show which would be bought and paid for — as, for instance, by the presence in the household of the sycophantic cousin Walter.

Richerby's fears and the extraordinary precautions he had taken because of them were touched upon too. They had come upon her father suddenly, Alice said, during the past year. The fears had had a completely ephemeral tone so sharply in contrast with that dramatic gesture of having the boundary fencing topped with charged wire. That had been startlingly concrete, and still her father had never indicated with a single positive word the nature of the dangers he was guarding himself against.

This reticence had upset Alice tremendously, much more than if she had known the precise nature of the danger, and had thrown herself and Walter and the household into a virtual state of nervous siege. The creaking of a door at night, she continued, would make her imagine the most terrible perils to her father. She said with awkward earnestness, almost as a defiant note in conclusion to these many complex things: "I loved my father."

She said this and then looked at Peter, and his face lit up with an almost indecent exposure of his love for her. He said: "Sure. I know."

Starr's parting memory of the scene was of that flat avowal of Alice's, and of Judith Collidge reaching automatically over and taking the last French pastry from the plate.

Starr started the autopsy at five.

The bruises created by the metal brake-bar were formally listed by him as *ecchymoses*, of which there were many, and as contused wounds, of which there were but two, and either one of which could have proved fatal.

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The edges of these contused wounds were crushed and showed considerable infiltration of the adjacent tissues as well as several substances which, upon delicate examination, caused Starr to draw his breath in sharply.

He moved to a microscope and studied a single hair.

He returned to an inspection of the bruises and thought how rare it was for blunt force to leave a characteristic pattern. It did so (he knew) only when the violence was localized and the object which caused the impact was hard, as the brake-bar had been hard. He succeeded in blanching the bruises by continuously applying a pressure which forced the blood out of the surface vessels.

He felt that the grim picture was complete. . . .

O'Derry shepherded him swiftly through brief calls of courtesy on Chief Lutton and Medical Examiner Horrick (the malady was a mild ptomaine) and then spirited him to the O'Derry house for cocktails and an excellent dinner centered around pheasant with Ellen O'Derry — O'Derry's wife — and two minor O'Derrys, aged seven and ten. At nine-thirty a call came through. O'Derry answered it and said to Starr:

"We can go now. The boys have finished."

As they left the house and drove through oppressive heat that hinted at thunder, O'Derry gave Starr a résumé of the boys' activities.

The same two men were on guard at the Richerby gates. The *status quo* up at the house (they told O'Derry) remained unchanged except that the servants had all straggled back around dinner-time, even though they weren't due to report in from their day off until eleven. They had heard the most extravagant rumors and reports, and undoubtedly had wanted to sit at the fount of first-hand information, the doddering Chalice. They wanted, to a woman and a man, to be on hand when Mr. Walter was arrested.

Walter Richerby (the guards said) had created the only flurry of the evening, and he certainly was crazy as a coot. He had made mysterious signals to Patrolman Murphy in the fading twilight from a bedroom window, and had stared enigmatically for a moment into Murphy's upturned face before dropping a handful of chocolate-covered marshmallows down on it.

Chalice answered their ring, and at O'Derry's request led them back to his own sitting-room in the servants' quarters.

"We are interested," O'Derry said, "in trying to localize what it was that Mr. Richerby feared. We think you can help us. You were with him for years?"

"I became eighty last week, Mr. O'Derry. I entered service here as a groom with Mr. David Richerby's father around the time of Mr. David's birth." Chalice's heliotrope-tinted lips quivered into a smile as he added: "That is why I always regarded Mr. David's bequest to me of twenty-five

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thousand dollars as one of his jokes. I am sure that he felt there was never any chance that he would predecease me. Isn't it ironic that he has?"

"The joke scarcely strikes me as having been a pleasant one."

"No, even as a child I remember him as inclined that way. Some of his jests would slip beyond the bounds of — well, prankishness, and kept him from being really popular with other children."

Starr said: "Even as a child he had no friends?"

"No, Doctor, even then he hadn't what you might truly call a friend. Then his parents dying when he was seventeen threw him further still within himself."

"What was he afraid of, Chalice?"

"I only know this: No one during the past year was permitted to approach him unannounced, excepting myself and the staff, Miss Alice and Mr. Walter."

"Would that also apply to friends of his daughter? I am thinking of Mr. Peter Collidge."

"Yes, Doctor. There were no exceptions beyond those I've mentioned. I remember that shortly after Mr. Collidge had met Miss Alice last year he went out into the garden one day, and Mr. David halted him at the point of a gun. Mr. David kept him standing there at a distance until he had checked through the radiotelephone that Mr. Collidge had been invited to the house by Miss Alice. It was quite unpleasant, and resulted in Mr. Collidge and Miss Alice continuing their friendship by letters and most infrequent meetings at the home of mutual friends. Mr. Collidge never came here again, even though Mr. David frequently suggested to Miss Alice that he be invited."

"Wouldn't she?"

"No. I believe she felt that her father didn't really mean it."

"Did you feel that too?"

"Mr. David was singularly apt, Doctor, in making you sense the unspoken word." The smile drifted from his lips, leaving them bleak. "Miss Alice would sense it invariably."

Chalice led them back into the main part of the house. Miss Alice and Mr. Collidge, he told them, were in the conservatory. Mr. Walter was entertaining Mrs. Collidge in the drawing-room. He announced them.

The scene seemed unchanged since the afternoon, possibly because Judith Collidge still dominated it from the hearth. The tea service was gone, and heavily shaded lighting mercifully subdued the Arabs and maidens and lions. Walter amply filled a deep armchair with his foot on a settle and a silver bowlful of chocolate-covered marshmallows near by.

He waved a languid hand at O'Derry and Starr, and said: "Judith, I hear the tumbrils roll. Those who have heads to shed, prepare to shed them now."

Judith's look was hotly fretful.

"Walter, stop being intolerable! Good evening, Doctor Starr — Mr. O'Derry. Alice is in the conservatory

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with Peter. Need we bother them?"

"I prefer not," O'Derry said. "There are some matters to be taken up among ourselves."

"Alice is dreadfully stricken. I think the shock might have been dangerous if Peter hadn't happened to come home on leave this morning."

Interesting, thought Starr, her repetition of that: that Peter had reached town in the morning; that Peter, as Judith Collidge had amplified at their earlier session, had come in on the ten-forty-five and had not reached the Collidge house until after eleven — when he had found Judith Collidge starting for a canter and had joined her.

Walter sighed fatuously: "They're in love." He closed his eyes and added dreamily: "And now that Cousin David has passed beyond, there's nothing in their path. I anticipate the wedding bells' triumphant peals. Love, as ever, finds a way."

"That's a vile implication, Walter."

"Can the truth ever be vile, Judith?"

"Certainly it can. Mr. O'Derry, when will this farce be ended?"

"What farce, Mrs. Collidge?"

"This abominable waiting. This nerve-racking procrastination." Judith stared with an odd combination of dread and enmity at Walter. "Surely there's only one solution to this crime?"

Walter opened his eyes and said pathetically. "She means me."

Judith's pallor was extraordinary.

"Very well, since you insist upon it. Mr. O'Derry, I accuse Walter of having murdered his cousin."

The pattern of melodrama still held good, even to the period gesture of Judith Collidge nervously tapping the braided riding-crop against her dress.

"I can almost see him," Judith went on passionately, "working out there in the hot sun, taking the brake-bar off the wheel-chair and listening to his cousin's taunting remarks while seething, until the feel of the bar in his hand made him murderous and he struck." Judith's voice grew strident in the room. She shook the riding-crop at Walter and said to him directly: "You felt that the blow left you free to enjoy life with your inheritance. You've been throwing up a smoke-screen of beastly implications to cover your own guilt."

"Honestly, Judith, I had no idea you could be so captivatingly dramatic. If I shouldn't be considered subversive, I'd cry '*Bis — bis!*' But doesn't your bravura apply to Chalice equally with myself?"

"Chalice?"

"Why not? Why not even more so? I at least am reasonably young and reasonably lazy. I could wait. But Chalice couldn't wait. He's eighty years old, and if he were to enjoy his preposterous inheritance at all, he had to do something about it. I suppose there were no fingerprints on the brake-bar, Mr. O'Derry? I'm certain that if there were, the gallows would have been erected before now."

"There were no fingerprints, Mr. Richerby. Just a smudge."

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"Smudge?"

"A smudge of chocolate."

Thunder rolled distantly in the stillness, filling the room with its muted and disturbing vibrations; and after a while Walter said: "A clever touch! Almost too clever. A veritable plethora of efficiency. You have had it analyzed, of course, Doctor Starr, and compared with the chocolate covering my marshmallows?"

"Yes. The chocolates differ."

Judith said fiercely to Walter: "But you would do that purposely. You would use a different sort of chocolate, and deliberately make the smudge so that people would believe you had been framed!"

"Yes, I might have at that. But it seems an awful lot of bother. In fact, all the details of the murder seem to have been elaborately troublesome." Walter looked speculatively at Starr. "I wonder whether you have determined what it was that David was afraid of? I have. Shall I tell you?"

"I feel sure that we will agree."

"Yes, you're clever enough to see it too. A good doctor would."

Judith said with sharp impatience: "No stranger, no one from outside, could have got at him. He never would have permitted a stranger to help him from the wheel-chair onto the other one. He had the gun, the radio-telephone, and time to protect himself. No one knows that better than you, Walter."

"Oh, strangers weren't his fear. Alice was his fear."

"Alice? Absurd."

"He was elaborate about it, Judith, but not absurd. David was an embittered, warped, tyrannical introvert if you wish, but he never was absurd. He was afraid that he would be left alone to stew in his own disagreeableness, as he should have been left alone. I did all right as a whipping-boy for his tantrums, and he was sure of me because I'm cat enough to like a rich home and an ultimate stake of one hundred thousand dollars. I can scarcely wait to begin spending it. He was sure of Chalice, too. But he wasn't sure of Alice."

"You're implying things again. They're aimed at Peter. How often do I have to remind you that Peter did not get off the train until after David Richerby was dead?"

"Peace, Judith! I am merely stating that David was terrified at the possibility of Alice marrying and leaving him, and that he took unusual precautions to prevent it. He built up this fictitious peril to himself, the vague threat from without. He did so after he feared that his invalid act wouldn't do the trick. He rang all the changes on that score, first with his imaginary gout, aches, and convincingly authentic wheel-chair. He believed in the power of the visual just as some people feel that a word is infallibly true if they see it in print. He knew it was stronger not just to say he was afraid of something, but to arrange visible precautions such as the revolver and the charged wire and the radio-telephone to summon help. Am I right, Doctor?"

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"Yes."

Judith said triumphantly: "But that proves my point! Not only could no one approach him, but if what you say is so, then there never was threat from the outside."

"Nothing but marriage, Judith. David's plan worked very well, you see, in spite of the fact that Alice is terribly in love with Peter. She never would have left David before his death. It was a cruel situation for her, and crueler still when Peter was taken into the army. What torture it must have been to feel that a bullet might be marked with his name." Walter added smugly: "And what torture for Peter!" He said pleasantly to O'Derry: "What other chocolate rabbits have you in your hat?"

O'Derry, who wanted to slap him, managed to say equably: "The small wrench has been found which removed the brake-bar. It would fit easily into a pocket. It had been shoved under the earth at the edge of a bed of delphiniums."

"I noted no signs from my window of any general excavating."

"The spot was determined by the deeper tone of the moist earth brought to the top when the wrench was buried."

"I am beginning, Mr. O'Derry, to be puzzled by this unusual official candor. Or is it the new technique?"

O'Derry's manner grew formal, cold.

"This is not a pleasant moment for me, Mr. Richerby. I have asked Doctor Starr to come with me to give a more authoritative report on the autopsy than I could."

Walter's eyes were wickedly bright. "You sha'n't trap me, Doctor. I shall never confess."

"Mr. O'Derry isn't trying to trap you, Mr. Richerby. He prefers to expose his hand fully to save the State the cost of a trial. He has asked me to tell what I know must have occurred from my findings, much as I would have to testify to them on the witness-stand."

"But we know what occurred. It's just a question of whether I did it, or Chalice."

"This is what occurred, Mr. Richerby. Your cousin was seated in the wheel-chair reading a novel of Meredith's. He was absorbed in this story and not aware of anyone approaching him through the delphiniums behind him. A blow was struck on the back of his head. The injury to his skull was sufficient to kill him. I found in this contused wound a single hair, one not even remotely similar to his own hair. It had been driven into the wound by the weapon."

"What weapon? According to you, David was still in the wheel-chair, and the brake-bar hadn't been removed."

"That's right. The force of this blow also caused his body to slump out of the chair and onto the sod. It lay there during the ten minutes or so it took to remove the brake-bar. Then a second crushing blow was given, this time with the brake-bar. This blow drove identifiable bits of

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sod into the wound. Then, stupidly, the presumably berserk pattern of superficial bruises was made, after which the body was lifted and placed in the garden-chair — where it was found."

"You say stupidly, Doctor?"

"Stupid in this sense, Mr. Richerby. The bruises proved that the brake-bar had been used as a weapon only *after* your cousin was dead. They completely dispelled the fictitious picture which had been created of the crime."

"Isn't that a matter of opinion?"

"No. It is possible to test a bruise to determine whether it occurred before or after death. It's a question of blanching."

"Blanching? Curious term. I thought it was confined to almonds."

"When a bruise is produced after death, it is possible to blanch it through forcing the blood out of the surface vessels by applying a continuous pressure. I was able to do so in your cousin's case. This could not have been done with a bruise inflicted before death, as the blood would already have been extravasated into the subcutaneous tissues."

"What ripe fields for conjecture do seem to be opening up! You agree with me, Judith?"

Judith Collidge controlled herself desperately. She said: "What weapon struck that first blow, Doctor?"

"The one in your hand, Mrs. Collidge. The leather braiding of the knob of your riding-crop covers a ball of lead. A fragment of the leather has been isolated from among the matter in the wound." Starr's voice became stern. "Your saga, as I've heard it called, is ended. You planned and carried out this miserable crime, not for your foster son's happiness, but because you knew you would share the fortune when he married Alice Richerby. You could return to the rich manner of life that pleased you, and no longer have to suffer the tasks imposed by penury. You conceived that brake-bar business to throw the crime upon a member of the household."

Her teeth bared slightly, and her voice was bold again.

"Have you considered the impossibility of getting over that charged wire without setting off the alarm?"

"You cleared that fence on your mare, Mrs. Collidge. Hoofprints have been found where she landed after the jump. The hair driven into the lethal wound was one that had adhered to your riding-crop — a horsehair, and the color was roan."

Starr left her to O'Derry. He walked along the hallway and stood for a moment at the conservatory door. It was at a distance from the drawing-room, and he hoped that neither Alice nor Peter had heard the unpleasant manner in which Judith Collidge had broken down. He saw them at its farther end on a settee flanked by gardenias. He thought:

"This is the time. Peter can stand it best. They're strong with happiness. I'll tell them now."

He started down the path.

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SPECIAL AWARD FOR THE BEST SHORT-SHORT: VINCENT CORNIER

Vincent Cornier's "O Time, in Your Flight" has a curious history. In its original version, as first submitted to EQMM's Sixth Annual Contest, it was a full-length short story. The plot was complicated, but buried among the complexities was a magnificent plot-device — something new and fresh and stimulating. We felt that this main plot-idea was hurt, rather than helped, by all its supporting minutiae, that here was one instance where full structural development had back fired.

So, we suggested to Mr. Cornier that he do a drastic rewrite. Why not, we asked, pull out the "big idea" of the story, and use that, and that alone, as the plot framework — and do it not in 7000 words but in 2000? The author was attracted to our suggestion. In the new version he finally decided to retain the main plot-idea and one other clue, and the finished product confirmed the wisdom of this decision: the supplementary material adds richness to the story.

Mr. Cornier wrote to us that the revision proved "a tantalizing wee job, but I think I managed it." Indeed, we agree. To be forewarned is to be forearmed; nevertheless, and with calculated risk, we hereby give you a superlative gimmick in short-short form.

O TIME, IN YOUR FLIGHT

by VINCENT CORNIER

On evidence, it appeared that old Benjamin Jaffa was shot and killed precisely at four thirty-six on Friday afternoon, the eleventh of June.

Jaffa was a semi-retired and wealthy jeweler. His safe, in his house of Manor Fields in the village of Layethorpe, had been opened by the killer who had used his victim's keys. Jewels, mainly unset, to the value of twenty-seven thousand pounds had been stolen. The lists of carat-weight, identities, and valuation were supplied by Alaric Ineby, Ben Jaffa's business manager. Ineby had been in Layethorpe on that fatal day — but his alibi eliminated him from any suspicion of implication in the crime.

Until February in that year Jaffa had been a happy and sociable neighbor in the village. Then his blind sister, Leah, died. Grief altered him: he became a somber recluse. His in-

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door servants and the gardener were discharged and a slovenly daily woman, Mrs. Lizzie Swires, was engaged instead. Mrs. Swires found the body on the Saturday morning.

Jaffa was hunched over his desk in the study. A pen was in his hand and an open checkbook, with the top check filled in on the date-line only, lay on the desk. The gray head showed two wounds. One was a superficial groove — caused by a bullet which had plowed his scalp to plunge, thereafter, into the casement of a little desk-clock; the other was that of the instantaneously fatal slug, in the back of the head.

The desk-clock was of vital importance. Ben Jaffa was a well-known collector of rare horological specimens, and this was his greatest personal treasure . . . "personal" because it had, for him, a deep Hebraic symbolism, and also because it had served his blind sister, Leah, so well. It was a masterpiece from the hands of John Arnold, of Eighteenth Century London, and had always been in the possession of the Jaffa family.

It was devoid of glazing. Its enameled face was marked by golden studs instead of Roman or Arabic numerals. Each showed an emblem of one of the Twelve Tribes, with a superimposed Hebrew letter: *aleph*, *beth*, *gimel*, *daleth*, *he* — up to *yud-aleph* and *yud-beth*, eleven and twelve. Blind Leah's fingertips, touching these letters and the pointers, told her the time instantly.

It was the master-clock of the whole collection. Jaffa was finical over time-recording and this desk-clock — as Alaric Ineby told the police — was always correct to a split-second. The shot that creased Jaffa's scalp had stopped the delicate mechanism, instantly destroying it. Since those golden filigreed pointers were rigidly affixed to the central driving spindle, there was no possibility of their having slipped, even a fraction, either way.

Microscopic examination proved that no hands except those of Jaffa had touched the timepiece in weeks — the ham-handed Mrs. Swires was never permitted to clean the study. Neither could anyone, by use of instrument or otherwise, have fixed a false time. John Arnold's superb mechanism was not served by outside studs or controls. If incorrect time were shown, the clock had to be stopped until the exact time "caught up."

Alaric Ineby always visited Layethorpe on Fridays. Ben Jaffa's habits were fixed, and he demanded observance of them from anyone whom he employed. Ineby usually arrived at Manor Fields at noon, went over accounts with Jaffa, and left at two o'clock. A late lunch was always waiting for him at *The Bay Horse Inn* — and Ineby spent the remainder of the day drinking, yarning, and playing draught-games with the landlord, Sam Bowker.

All this routine was carried out on the fatal Friday, with one trifling exception. Ineby turned up at the inn

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dressed in slacks and shirt, and changed into shorts. He often walked back to Leeds, his home town, by way of the moorlands and told Bowker he wanted to "get used to wearing hikers' kit — same as everyone else."

Ben Jaffa was alive at four o'clock. At that hour on Fridays, Mrs. Swires usually served him a light meal and collected her weekly wage. She then went home and Jaffa always spent the remaining hours of the day in reading and meditation, preparatory to his Sabbath visit to the Leeds Synagogue.

The killer must have been known to the old man. Tracks in a neglected paddock showed that a man had swished through the weeds and long meadow grass to reach the kitchen garden, thus entering Manor Fields from the rear. Jaffa, in his study, could see that approach. Moreover, Jaffa had no fear of it . . . the killer must have been standing immediately behind his victim as Jaffa sat at the desk.

There all rested. Police inquiry could go no further. Witnesses testified, unanimously, that Ineby — the only possible suspect — was seen to enter *The Bay Horse* at ten past two, and he positively never left the inn again until after seven o'clock in the evening; and no stranger had been seen around Layethorpe.

Then entered a lifelong friend of old Ben Jaffa — one Barnabas Hildreth, a top-ranking Secret Service chief. The Scotland Yard men and the Leeds Police were stupefied. For the Assistant Commissioner of the Yard peremptorily told them to accept Hildreth as *persona grata*. . . .

Detective-Inspector Newbolt was detailed to Hildreth's service. All witnesses were re-examined; all exhibits and the premises of Manor Fields were re-inspected; the whole *dossier* was re-opened — only, the wary-minded Newbolt noted, Alaric Ineby was not interviewed. Perhaps that was because of Ineby's recent illness — rather serious, too. Ineby had come down with a violent attack of chicken pox, the night of the thirteenth. . . .

Newbolt liked this tall and cold-mannered man with the luminous brown eyes and the graceful gestures, but found his patience strained by some of Hildreth's curious investigations. They appeared futile: especially that line which concerned the exact periods of sunshine recorded at Layethorpe on the day of the murder.

"Can't quite see the use of it all," Newbolt grumbled, as they sat in *The Bay Horse* with whiskey, conning the various reports. "What the heck has the sun to do with the job? Here, sir, you've worried the tripes out of more'n a dozen simple citizens — and to what end?"

Hildreth riffled his local weather-reports. He said softly, "That of . . . Alaric Ineby."

"*Eh?*" Newbolt actually jumped, angrily, disappointedly. "What on earth *is* all this? With respect, Mr. Hildreth, it — it just doesn't make sense! Ineby is entirely outside every possible calculation."

"Not mine. In my opinion, Ineby is a subtle and diabolically clever

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criminal. He has put up an ironclad alibi — and now he is sitting back, laughing his head off."

"But the Secret Service —" manifestly Newbolt was chagrined and angry — "by magical methods unknown to us poor dumb-cluck coppers, can get this rap to stick on him — eh?"

"You have reason for your attitude, Newbolt. But I say that Benny Jaffa was my very dear friend and that Ineby killed him for gain." A sudden flash of power startled Newbolt. "For that I shall hang him!"

"Just" — and the Detective-Inspector filled his pipe, to evade those burning eyes — "*how?*"

"First of all, by these references you have despised." Hildreth touched the evidence gathered on the sunshine periods. "They help prove my case. For instance, taken into consideration with your report of Ineby's illness, which began on Sunday night, I am now convinced he was the man of whom Jaffa was not afraid, the man who walked through that weedy paddock — the man who entered Manor Fields the back way. Except for one or two sunny hours, late in the day, Friday was overcast, cloudy, and sultry. Ineby first wore slacks; then he changed into shorts, which exposed his bare legs. For centuries doctors were puzzled by sudden outbreaks of 'chicken pox' in country districts in summer months. Two years ago several Royal Air Force men on a cross-country training run were severely stricken with it. Government research scientists got busy — you'll find their report in the *British Medical Journal* for last July — and determined the hitherto unknown cause . . . the weed, *anthriscus sylvestris*, otherwise known as 'keck'."

"Wh-what? D'you mean 'dead-man's oatmeal' — that simple stuff?"

"Exactly. That paddock back of Manor Fields is full of it. Its dusts generate a vapor akin to that of mustard gas. Peculiarly, sunburned skin isn't affected, nor can any harm be done if the day is overcast. But in bright hot sun-glare, on newly exposed skin, the poison enters and the victim falls ill with 'chicken pox,' forty-eight hours after contact."

"I — I must accept that, sir. I'm old enough in this game to recognize solid truth when I hear it."

"Thank you, Newbolt." Hildreth spread his hands. "If Ineby were going to murder a man and steal from him, how useful this simulation of 'hiker' — eh? Fear of blood spurts — if they got on his bared legs he could easily take his long pants out of his rucksack and put 'em on over the legs; the rucksack useful also for carrying away the stolen property."

"But there's the all-important matter of Ineby's alibi, sir — it's unbreakable! Ineby was in this inn at precisely the time the murder was committed."

"John Arnold of Eighteenth Century London," Hildreth mused, "once made a watch for George the Third. The king cursed him for having made a 'damned warming pan,' and sent it back. Yet, Newbolt, that watch is

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still the master of the British Broadcasting Corporation's time signals, and it is still taken from Greenwich to every great clock in London to control timing. The genius who made that watch also made Jaffa's desk-clock. It commemorated the time spent by his family in The Babylonian Captivity. As the name Jaffa indicates, my friend Benny was a Jew of the *Sephardim*, out of the ancient Babylonian East.

"In Babylon, water clocks recorded time at night as the sun recorded it on the daytime's dials. Water running out of one cylinder dropped a pointer from sunset to midnight; welling up into another cylinder, it caused a pointer to float up from midnight to sunrise. Among the very orthodox Hebrews, mechanical duplication of this method of timing remains — in extremely rare clocks like Jaffa's."

"But — but, although it's all very interesting, sir, we don't seem to get anywhere. If the clock was so accurate, then it only *strengthens* Ineby's alibi! The killing was at four thirty-six and —"

"The two hours of bright sunshine extended from a quarter to six until, roughly, eight o'clock. In that period Ineby walked through the paddock and entered Jaffa's room. I surmise that he pretended he'd forgotten a check. He got the old man settled at his desk, then killed him with the first shot. Then, with his second shot, he deliberately sighted so as to crease the dead scalp and instantly stop the clock forever, without himself touching it. His alibi made complete, he set about his robbery."

Hildreth opened his pocket wallet. He showed Newbolt a photograph of the Hebrew clock. "You notice? No Roman or Arabic numerals." He pointed to the stud which usurped the place that the number eleven usually occupies on a dial. He tapped on each pictured golden stud. "Here you are — the shields of the Twelve Tribes, and Hebrew letters . . ."

"Just a moment! You're tapping those Hebrew letters backwards —"

"Oh, no, I'm not. Don't you know that Hebrew reads backwards? The secret of this Arnold clock was what Ineby relied on to defeat you. I am counting *forward* in Hebrew — one, two, three, four . . . In Jaffa's old Hebraic time this clock stopped not at four thirty-six — *but at seven twenty-four in the evening!* Face that photo to any mirror and prove it for yourself, Newbolt. That old mechanism sent those pointers around that dial *anti*-clockwise. See? To us the dial says four thirty-six — to Jaffa, and to that cunning swine, Ineby — it told the exact time of day. That sunny hour . . ."

Tremblingly Newbolt faced the print to a mirror. Then he let out a great shout and grabbed for a telephone. . . .

Backward, turn backward, O Time, in your flight . . .
— ELIZABETH AKERS ALLEN

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Shortly after Carolyn Wells died, her fine collection of books was sold at public auction. Actually, Carolyn Wells had two libraries, each separate and distinct from the other. The first — first, we hasten to say, in monetary value, but not in Carolyn Wells's affection — was her well-known collection of first editions by such authors as Walt Whitman, Herman Melville, and Edward Lear; the second — perhaps the better loved, when all is said and done — was her collection of detective stories.

Now, Miss Wells, as you know, was one of the most prolific mystery writers of all time. She wrote nearly a hundred detective novels, most of them featuring her workmanlike sleuth, Fleming Stone; but she seldom tilted her typewriter at the windmill of the short story — a mere handful are in existence, not even enough for a slim paperback edition. It is interesting, therefore, that one of Carolyn Wells's rare short stories should reflect both her book-collecting passions — her "serious" side, since the story revolves about a first edition of Shakespeare's VENUS AND ADONIS, *and her "entertainment" side, since the story is a straightforward tale of crime and detection.*

We are deeply indebted to Rose Riccobono of New York City for not only calling this story to our attention but making available the original text which first appeared in 1940 in "The Dolphin," published by the Limited Editions Club . . .

THE SHAKESPEARE TITLE-PAGE MYSTERY

by CAROLYN WELLS

THAT'S the way with you collectors! You were just crazy with joy when you got a first LEAVES OF GRASS in wrappers. And now you want a first VENUS, and I don't suppose you care whether she has her wrapper on or not!"

"I do want a first VENUS AND ADONIS, but I have not forgotten my other treasures — my true first —"

"I know, your fifty-five ALICE —"

"No, Sherry," Herenden corrected him gently. "Fifty-five LEAVES and sixty-five ALICE. You know nothing of rare books."

"Rare! Rare!" Young Sherry Biggs enjoyed heckling those two famous collectors, Garrett Sheldon and Leigh Herenden, their host. "Why is a thing valuable because it's rare? An

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honest man is rare, does any one care for him? A good woman is rare, who collects those? O Boy! as Shakespeare says in MERRY WIVES, Three, four, thirty-six, you collectors are an unmixed evil. This craze for rare books breeds crime. You're always guarding against theft."

"No, Sherry," his host smiled at him, "you're wrong there. I've guarded my treasures once and for all. Want to see my book room?"

Like many another good American, whose wealth piled itself up after the manner of Ossa on Pelion, Leigh Herenden had built a house for himself on Long Island, and the library occupied a large wing. They had to go down two or three steps to it, as seems to be the case with most self-respecting libraries.

"Your stenographer is a pretty girl," Sherry Biggs noticed in passing.

"Muriel Jewell," Herenden said carelessly. "I have little to do with the girl. I've little to do, anyhow. Herbert Rand is my secretary, and Gorman is my confidential book-buyer."

"It must be nice," Sheldon said, musingly, "to have a lynx-eyed librarian like Gorman to nose out rare volumes for you. But somehow, I'd feel I was losing half the fun if I didn't make my own discoveries."

"Everyone to his taste," Herenden conceded, and his gray eyes were kindly, with no hint of criticism. "I know," he went on, "there is a noble sentiment that decrees, 'not the quarry, but the chase; not the laurel, but the race,' and yet, I do not enjoy poking around in the rare bookshops as much as I do having my quarry in hand."

He led the way into a steel-lined safe, the size of a small room, and showed Sherry its hidden devices to balk both the moth that corrupts and the thief who breaks through and steals. As Sheldon was about to leave, Herenden turned to him.

"I have an announcement to make this afternoon."

"I'll stay, then," his neighbor and rival collector decided. Garrett Sheldon had a feeling that the news would concern a new acquisition to the already famous Herenden library, and he prepared himself to feel jealous pangs, which he would conceal at all cost. . . .

"You know," Leigh Herenden began that afternoon, "that among other favorites, I am specializing in Shakespeare. And only now have I been able to find a first edition of VENUS AND ADONIS."

Their excited hubbub of questions and exclamations obliged him to pause.

"Go on!" cried Sheldon, "don't stop at the most interesting point! Where did you get it? And—" he almost said, "how much did you pay for it?" but changed his question to—"how did you hear of it?"

"It was a heaven-sent boon," Herenden smiled happily. "I was asked if I wanted it, and I said I did."

"I'll bet there was something shady

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about your getting it!" Sherry Biggs exclaimed.

"Maybe." Herenden showed no offense. "If so, I sin in company with Cardinal Mazarin. I have read on good authority that 'a little pilfering here and there was never known to upset Mazarin — if the book he coveted was worthy of it.'"

Sherry turned up his youthful nose. "Anybody would think it was a Gutenberg Bible you were talking about."

"A real first edition of VENUS AND ADONIS is worth more than a Gutenberg Bible, if you are speaking of money value." Herenden gave Sherry a glance of reprimand.

"But I happen to know that the first and second editions of the book you are talking about are exactly alike, except for the date. Now, how can it matter which one you possess?"

"You know very well that, to a collector, age is the pre-eminent point of value. Age in a book is much the same as youth in a woman."

"Such a fuss about books!"

"But where is your book, Leigh?" asked Garrett Sheldon. "Seeing is believing."

"Sorry, but I can't show it today. It isn't yet tuned to the atmosphere of my collection. Come back Sunday night and see 'the first heir of my invention.' You'll covet it, I know."

"Hardly that! As I have one of my own. A real one."

"You have a first VENUS AND ADONIS! I never knew that!"

"A fine copy, too."

"Bring it with you to the party tomorrow night. We'll show off together."

After the guests had gone, Herenden said to Gorman, his book-buyer and librarian, with a perplexed air, "Did you hear Sheldon say he had a first?"

"I did, Mr. Herenden, but it can't be possible."

"No, I suppose not. Of course, people in England are glad to sell their books over here just now. But another first VENUS! It can't be."

"Unless somebody found a nest —"

"Don't be silly, Gorman. They didn't have nests in those days."

"No, sir. But Mr. Sheldon must have something. Could it be a faked copy?"

"Oh, no. That book is too well known to be faked. There were thirteen or more editions, and every copy is located. We know where each one is, though, of course, the later editions are of far less value. Keep the secret, Gorman — don't let anybody know where our book came from. Some day, perhaps I may tell."

"I've told no one, sir. Not even Rand knows where it came from."

"It is a wonderful find. Sheldon couldn't have got one the same way, could he?"

"Not likely. Such things don't happen often."

"And the lad is all right? He won't tell?"

"Oh, no! He won't even remember it."

"If ever the proper time comes, I shall tell the whole story, and give up

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the book. But you won't suffer, I promise you. All I've given you, you may keep, and I shall give you more if all goes well. I suppose I'm an accessory before the fact. Even so, I assume all responsibility, and if we are found out, no blame shall attach to you. You have confidence in Baines?"

"Oh, yes, sir. He has no idea it is a valuable book. He is more than satisfied with what you paid him."

"Am I interrupting a private confab?" Rand's cheery voice was followed by his appearance.

"Not at all," Herenden replied, a trifle coldly. "Come in. What is it?"

"Only this, Mr. Herenden. May I have the afternoon off? I've got the desk cleared and I'd like to go to the golf tournament; a friend of mine is playing today."

"Certainly, Rand. You are a wizard at finishing your work, I must say. By the way, Rand, can you be here tomorrow evening? I'm going to show my new VENUS to some admiring friends, and you know where everything is."

"So does Gorman. But just as you say, Mr. Herenden."

Rand left them, and Gorman said, "Do you suppose he heard what we were saying? He's a quick fellow, and we were talking pretty plainly."

"Don't worry about it. And now I'm off to the golf tournament myself. Put the time lock on the safe, if you go out."

After Herenden had gone, Gorman went to the safe, where he could have found any book in the dark, had it been necessary. He took down the VENUS AND ADONIS.

Back again in the library, he sat down to gloat over the acquisition — a small volume, measuring a bit over seven inches one way, and a trifle over five the other. Its cover was of old calf, worn and rubbed, a little soiled, and showing no title or legend of any kind.

Ralph Gorman was a practical man. He opened the book with intense interest but with no feeling of reverence, and read the title-page. VENUS AND ADONIS. Then some lines in Latin, which he did not understand. Then the information that the book was printed by Richard Field — in 1593.

Just those four figures gave the tiny volume its worth. A fourth edition of the VENUS had once sold at auction for $75,000. Rare books had gone up in price since then. And what would a first sell for? His eyes widened. He knew of several men in these United States who would gladly pay more — a great deal more — than $100,000 for this plain little book!

He put the precious volume back in the case which Herbert Rand had made for it. Rand was clever with books. He did any necessary repairing — Herenden knew better than to have any unnecessary repairing done — and he could collate with neatness and dispatch.

Gorman pored over Herenden's reference works on rare books. Yes, the second edition of the VENUS was exactly the same as this first, save for the date, 1594, on the title page. The

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first edition was "printed with remarkable accuracy, doubtless from the author's manuscript." The only known copy was in the Bodleian Library at Oxford, and many facsimiles had been made from it.

Aha! thought Gorman, that's it! Mr. Sheldon has a facsimile and he thinks he can put it over on us! We'll see about that!

On Sunday evening the party came. Most of Leigh Herenden's friends were interested in books, for one reason or another, and many of the guests were collectors. Others were writers or playwrights or actors. They all knew enough of the situation to be eager to see the two books that were to be shown.

Garrett Sheldon came in, bringing a stranger, whom he introduced to Herenden. "Malcolm Osborne," he said, "and I warn you, Leigh, he knows his first editions from the ground up. He can decide which of us has the real first."

"Very kind of Mr. Osborne," Leigh said, politely. "You have your book with you, Sheldon? Gorman will bring mine."

As the librarian returned from the safe-room with Herenden's copy, Sheldon produced his volume.

"After you," Herenden said.

Sheldon opened a dark-red morocco case and took out his book.

It was impossible to misinterpret the murmur of surprised disappointment that rippled through the room. Two or three young people even laughed, but Garrett Sheldon winked at Herenden and said, "I assure you that this little book makes up in worth what it lacks in size."

As the crowd surged toward him, he handed the book to Leigh Herenden. And it certainly looked like the real first edition of VENUS AND ADONIS. Gorman, standing by him, looked at it too, and they were both startled by the verity of it, or the perfection of imitation, whichever it might be.

"And now," said Sheldon, smiling, "where's yours, Leigh?"

Gorman, feeling queer, as he said afterward, passed Herenden's book to him. Removing the case, the host offered the volume to his guest.

Sheldon took it smilingly, looked it over rather carelessly, and placed it on the table beside the one he had brought.

"They look alike," he said slowly.

They did look alike — almost exactly. Two small, seemingly insignificant books, both bound in old calf, both dark brown and worn at the edges and corners. Nondescript affairs, with no physical charm or beauty.

"May I open this?" Herenden smiled.

"Indeed, yes. I'll look into yours, then we'll turn them over to Osborne, and ask his opinion."

Gorman stayed beside Herenden as they looked at the title-page. Both were amazed at its perfectness. Surely those figures were neither facsimiles nor fakes. Sheldon must have achieved the miracle of getting another first at the same time Herenden acquired his.

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Sheldon and Osborne had their heads together over the other book.

"This is yours, Mr. Herenden?" and Osborne tapped the old brown binding.

"Yes, Mr. Osborne."

"You don't care to tell where you got it?"

"I'd rather not. You find no flaw in it?"

"Sorry, but I most decidedly do. It has an entire new title-page for one thing, there is a flyleaf missing, and it has been rebound. That's all I can see without a magnifying glass, but it is enough to prove to my mind that you were badly hoaxed. Have you had any other expert examine it?"

"No, but I have absolute confidence in it."

"Absolute confidence, Mr. Herenden, is a fine thing. I wish you had it in me, for what I tell you is true. While I hate to displease you, I think you should know the facts, whether you like them or not."

"You are quite right, Mr. Osborne, and I thank you. But I am sure this is boring our other guests. Shall we go to the living-room?"

After the guests had departed, Herenden turned to his librarian with a face of utter wonder.

"What does it mean, Gorman?" he said.

"I'd like to think there's been some jiggery-pokery and the books were switched — but that's impossible, Mr. Herenden."

"Yes; mine has been in the safe-room ever since I have had it. It *is* my book, isn't it, Gorman?"

"No doubt about it, sir. Here's your bookplate, that I put in myself. And here's that old inkspot on the back cover. It's faint, but we decided it was ink, didn't we?"

"Oh, yes, I remember. We decided that anything used to remove it would make a worse stain."

"Yes, sir. And Mr. Osborne says this whole title-page is new. It doesn't look so to me. But you must remember, sir, that when you — er — bought the book, you were given no guaranty of its genuineness —"

"That is quite true." Herenden smiled now. "All the same, I shall not rest until I am certain about the matter. I want to have another expert pass on it. Osborne may be all right, but there's no one in the world with the knowledge of old books that Kent has."

"Kent?"

"Yes. The English statesman. He's in this country now on diplomatic affairs, but if anything would interest him, this matter will. I'll set about getting him."

Herenden did set about it, and secured Godfrey Kent's promise to visit him and stay overnight. Herenden was so elated that he invited Sheldon to come and hear the final decision from the great man.

Sheldon came, and Herenden sent his car to meet Kent at train after train. He telephoned to New York and found that Godfrey Kent had left his hotel about five o'clock, in-

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tending to visit him. But the last train passed, and the Herenden chauffeur brought back an empty car.

"Some official business turned up, I suppose." Leigh Herenden hid his disappointment as Sheldon smiled and told him good night.

The next morning a visitor arrived early. Herenden hurried into his clothes and went down to meet him.

"I'm Pierson," the stranger announced, "of the New York Police. Do you know Godfrey Kent? He was found dead in the woods along the Palisades. Brutally murdered. He had your address in his pocket."

"What a terrible thing! It seems incredible." Herenden told how Kent had intended to visit him. "Gorman," he called, "Mr. Kent has been murdered."

"On account of the book?" Gorman said impulsively.

"What book?" the detective asked quickly. "The notes with your address seemed to refer to some play by Shakespeare."

"A poem." Herenden nodded, and told the story of his VENUS with the doubtful title-page.

"May I see it?" Pierson compared the book with Kent's typewritten notes which were headed *Re V. and A.* "This says the true book must have two fly-leaves in front, and two in back. I find only one in the back of your copy, Mr. Herenden."

"I fear my book is not a real first after all."

"When you got that book, Mr. Herenden," Gorman said, firmly; "it had two fly-leaves in the back. Somebody must have torn one out!"

"Easy now, Mr. Gorman," Pierson said, in his common-sense way. "Someone has done more than damage a fly-leaf. Now, if you will give me the name of Mr. Kent's New York hotel, it will help the Homicide Bureau. Confidentially, we think the murderer was a hired thug."

He left Herenden shuddering.

"I hope," Gorman said grimly, "that they get the fellow."

When Pierson came back to the Herenden house, he was greeted like a long-lost brother.

"Any luck?" Herenden asked, after the detective had been made comfortable in the library.

"The answer is yes. First of all, we have the hired gunman who murdered Mr. Kent. We haven't found out yet who is back of the crime, but we will. I have a pretty definite notion myself."

"What did you learn about the book?" Herenden could hold off no longer.

"I went to the Public Library and to several other libraries, and I can face the examiners as to Shakespeare's earliest printed work. I hate to hold out, Mr. Herenden, but I have suspicion of a crime against you. Let me get my bearings." Pierson rose. "This is your library. There is your safe-room. Here is your office. Now we make our real start. Which desk is whose? I must look into them all. Much may be learned from a desk."

Gorman became their usher, and

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Pierson worked methodically. He went through the desks quickly, yet seemed to see all their contents. He smiled at the stenographer's, which held a complete beautifying outfit and an old copy of THE ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES. Then he passed on to Rand's desk.

"Meticulous chap here, and a good bookkeeper. Not a blot nor erasure in his work. And his handwriting tells his character. See, not a flourish or unnecessary stroke. You trust him completely?"

"I'd trust Rand and Gorman with my life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness, and I'd come out on top."

"All right. Now, Mr. Herenden, I want to go over to see Mr. Sheldon."

As he left, Muriel Jewell, the stenographer, came into the library.

"Mr. Herenden," she began, "I didn't mean any harm, I only meant —"

"Miss Jewell, if you have a confession to make, and it sounds like that, please tell us frankly what it is all about."

"I didn't think it was wrong —"

Just then Sherry Biggs came in. He was a privileged visitor, and he helped himself to a chair and a cigarette.

But Muriel had lost courage for the confession she wanted to make. "Oh," she said, "Mr. Herenden, please let him stay long enough to tell me something. It's this, Mr. Biggs," she went on, as Herenden nodded permission. "You were talking about our slang phrases being in Shakespeare. Did he really write, 'I'll tell the world'?"

"MEASURE FOR MEASURE, Two, four, one fifty-four."

"And did he really make up 'Not so hot'?"

"Sure thing: KING LEAR, Five, three, sixty-seven."

"And —"

"That's enough. You can find all these things in a Shakespeare Concordance. Hello, here comes the policeman. Want me to go away, Mr. Herenden? Why don't you have some arras in this room — they're so nice to hide behind."

"Arras are not plural, Sherry. Arras is the name of a place in France, famous for its tapestries."

"Must I go, Mr. Herenden?"

"Sorry. Run along now, Sherry."

Young Biggs went off, and Muriel was sent out of the office as they heard Pierson returning. She spoke to him in the hall.

"Tell me that again!" he said.

She told him, and he grinned.

"We've got 'em!" he cried. "Sure you can remember?"

"Oh, sure. Five, nineteen, thirty-three, forty-seven."

"Marvelous, Holmes, marvelous! How do you do it?"

"Just add fourteen each time. See?"

"Faintly. Whoever would have believed you could do a thing like that?"

"Do you think Mr. Herenden will be mad at me?"

"Mad! He'll give you a medal!"

Two red spots burned in Muriel's cheeks as Pierson insisted that she set forth with him on the great quest of the VENUS. The entire library staff

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was drafted for a short and pleasant march over to the Sheldon house. Pierson led off, escorting Miss Jewell; they were followed by Herenden and Herbert Rand; Gorman brought up the rear.

When they reached the house, Pierson rang the bell. The door opened, and he saw to it that all the others were inside the house before he went in himself. Sheldon greeted them in some surprise.

Without preamble, Pierson said, "Mr. Sheldon, I am here to charge you with taking a book that belongs to Mr. Herenden, and claiming it as your own; also, with putting in its place a book of similar character, but of far less value."

"That is a strange charge to make, Mr. Pierson, and I deny it!"

"Will you produce the copy of VENUS AND ADONIS which is now on your shelf?"

Sheldon brought the volume.

"I will first," Pierson said, "show you that this copy is changed and amended to make it look like the other, and then I will tell you what happened to the books. This," he picked up the one that Sheldon had given him, "is a real 1593 edition of VENUS AND ADONIS. Except for this, there is only one copy known, and that is in the Bodleian Library at Oxford. But all present know the details of this first edition. You know that the second or 1594 edition is exactly like this except for the date on the title-page. As you see these two books now, they both appear to be dated 1593. But while this one is a true 1593, the other is a 1594, which has been supplied with a new title-page, dated 1593. This title-page, in order that it should be of the right paper, was made of one of the flyleaves, taken from the back of the book. This in itself gives away the fake, for often the flyleaves of old books were of a trifle thicker paper than the rest of the book, as is the case in this instance. The volume was taken apart, the new title-page put in place and the old one discarded, the book rebound — in its own binding, of course, and that part was done so neatly that it is almost unnoticeable. I accuse Mr. Sheldon of doing this work, or having it done, for the purpose of exchanging his own made-over book for the honest-to-goodness 1593 of Mr. Herenden's. The switch was made on Sunday afternoon, before Mr. Herenden's party."

"You have heard a tissue of lies," Sheldon began, but it is not wise to call a detective a liar. Also, though Sheldon did not know it, two other men had entered the room, behind him. They were the Assistant District Attorney and another police official.

"You still insist that this 1593 copy is your book, Mr. Sheldon?"

"I certainly do!"

"There are some peculiar designating marks on the pages here and there. Suppose you tell me what and where they are?"

"That's a trap, and I do not intend to fall into it. I put no marks in my most valuable books."

"No? Well, Miss Jewell put marks

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in Mr. Herenden's copy, before you appropriated it for your own. They are tiny marks, which, if they are still present, prove positively that this is Mr. Herenden's book. What pages did you mark, Miss Jewell?"

"I can tell you the pages, but the marks are so small I doubt if you can see them. I used a very sharp penknife to scratch the tails off certain commas on certain pages. This turned them into periods, you see."

"Why did you do this?"

"Only that there might be a positive identification if anything happened to Mr. Herenden's book. The defects of those comma-tails are scarcely noticeable."

"Can you tell me on what pages you made these erasures?"

"Oh, yes — five, nineteen, thirty-three, forty-seven."

"I can't look them up as fast as that. How do you remember them?"

"I added fourteen each time."

"I see. Now, I am looking on page five, but I can't find a tailless comma."

"Haven't you a lens? A document lens? Here is one."

She handed over the lens, and the tailless commas showed up.

Pierson then drew attention to the bookplates. "You rather slipped up here, too, Mr. Sheldon. Mr. Gorman is too particular to use glue on a bookplate. He uses paste."

"That is a special gum I use on my own bookplates. I know nothing of what Mr. Herenden has on his."

"Well, then, note this. With this document lens I can see clearly the gum at the edges of the bookplate in both volumes. Moreover, this glass shows me that you used a blotter to press down the bookplate. This made the gum ooze out a bit, and it caught a little purple fuzz from the blotter."

"What's all this nonsense?" Rand suddenly looked angry. "Who used blotters to mount a bookplate? I never heard of such a thing!"

"You hear of it now," Pierson told him. "Take this glass. Look at the gum and the specks of purple blotter on the edges of these two bookplates."

"He knows all about it," Sheldon said, suddenly. "He put in those bookplates, both of them. He was over here helping me one day, and he put in a lot of bookplates for me. I hate to do it myself. And I assume he may put in bookplates for Mr. Herenden."

"Do you know, Rand," said Pierson, "I believe you can't do better than to spill the whole business."

Rand looked frightened. "How can you ever pay me or pay for your book, Mr. Sheldon?" he almost groaned. "The second, you know."

"Squeal on me, will you, you young thief! Then I'll beat you to it. That is your book, Mr. Herenden — Rand thought it would be a fine thing to do what he calls a switch. He —"

"That will do, Sheldon." Herenden assumed charge. "Herbert, tell the whole story, briefly and truly."

"Yes, Mr. Herenden. Mr. Sheldon said he knew where he could get a second edition of VENUS AND ADONIS — just like the first, except for the date. He said if I would fix that, he

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would pay me a thousand dollars to have a new title-page printed, using one of the fly-leaves. And he made me make a sort of stain on the back cover, like the ink stain on your book. He got me in deeper and deeper. He said if I didn't obey him, he'd tell you and make it all seem my doing. And he made me switch the books on Sunday afternoon, before the guests came."

"Where did Mr. Sheldon get his second edition?" Herenden asked.

"I bought it." Sheldon was now trembling. "I intended to pay for it from the proceeds of the one which I took from you."

"And now you have spoiled that second edition, which you still owe for, and you have nothing to pay with."

"That's about the size of it."

"Hand over Mr. Herenden's property to him," Pierson said, sternly.

"Let him take it himself," Sheldon screamed, as Herenden did so. "You can't prove it's your property. You're afraid to tell where you got it."

One of the men at the back of the room interrupted him.

"Mr. Sheldon, it's for you to tell us what you had to do with the murder of Godfrey Kent."

Sheldon collapsed as he recognized the Assistant District Attorney, who took him in custody and kept Herbert Rand for further questioning.

Sherry Biggs was passing as the others left that stricken house. He took Muriel off for a drive, to teach her more Shakespearean slang. Herenden took the path home, with his true first VENUS, flanked by faithful Gorman and Pierson.

"I want to tell you about my book," Leigh told the man who had helped them, "though it's really Gorman's story. What was your English cousin's name, Gorman?"

"Baines. He's my second cousin. One night there was an unusually heavy air raid over London, and many homes fell to the ground. The next day, when Baines was walking around the ruins, he saw a chap sitting on a bit of fallen timber, reading an old book. The boy offered to sell it to him."

"Baines knew nothing about old books, but he knew Gorman did. So he sent it to America, saying that if we liked such silly old things, to sell it and send him half of whatever it brought."

"How did he get the book over here?" Pierson was deeply interested.

"Baines wrapped it up in newspaper and gave it to a lad who was coming over — a refugee. He sent word to Gorman what ship the boy was on. Gorman met the boy, took the book, and brought it to me. Here it is. Now, let me hear your opinion as to the ethics of all this. We don't know in whose ruined library the book was found, and we've no way of finding that out. So, what can I do but keep it?"

"Until the war is over and we can trace the real owner, it is your book, Mr. Herenden. The precious little volume is also a refugee, and a refugee is ever a sacred trust."

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Here is the last in the trilogy of short stories about Count Alessandro Cagliostro — another "turbulent tale" by Rafael Sabatini, the most famous historical novelist of his day . . . Cagliostro, who wore a magnificent hat plumed with white feathers, because the law in France in the late 18th Century required that all practitioners of medicine, peddlers of drugs, healers, soothsayers, mountebanks, alchemists, and toothdrawers wear white feathers . . . Cagliostro, who claimed that he had discovered the elixir of life everlasting and through its use had attained by 1784 the ripe young age of 2000 years . . . Cagliostro, who supplied Julius Caesar with the finances necessary for Caesar's expedition against Pompey, who dined with Cleopatra and was the guest of the Queen of Sheba, who was intimate with Nero and who had learned the arts of healing from no less a teacher than Hippocrates himself . . . or so Cagliostro said . . .

THE SPY

by RAFAEL SABATINI

ARMAND DE BAZANCOURT possessed, as we shall see, vision and a gift of inference. These, in spite of shortcomings which we shall also see, might, under any ministry but that of Thiroux de Crosne, have carried him far. A young man of good shape, elegant appointments, and engaging manner, he moved freely in the world of fashion, everywhere regarded as an amiable trifler, and nowhere suspected of association with the King's Lieutenant-General of Police.

It was, however, a part of the tragedy towards which the French Monarchy was sweeping that the office of Lieutenant-General was filled by the incompetent de Crosne. A self-sufficient numskull, whom Court influence alone had hoisted to his position, he concerned himself almost exclusively with petty oppressions of a people which, schooled in consciousness of its rights, was becoming impatient of every form of tyranny. He had no ear for the distant mutterings of the storm, no eye for the signs that alarmed Bazancourt, no patience with Bazancourt's attempts to claim his attention for these portents.

Above all, Bazancourt mistrusted the idealists who were loosed upon the world of Louis XVI. He knew the danger of these pseudo-intellectuals, these theorists who in crazy conceit would destroy the existing order without discerning how to replace it. He was aware of the dangerous forces of illuminism that toiled underground in Germany, his attention caught by the edict of the Elector of Bavaria against secret societies.

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He had studied the malign activities of Weishaupt, and he suspected the mysterious Count Alexandre de Cagliostro, who had descended upon Paris under the exalted sponsorship of the Cardinal-Prince Louis de Rohan, but who came no man knew whence, and who worked miracles that staggered humanity, of being a missionary of the German adept. Therefore, in order to investigate at close quarters, he had procured initiation to the Coptic Freemasonry over which Cagliostro presided.

He bore the fruits of his observations in the Lodge of Supreme Wisdom to de Crosne, and was mocked for his pains.

"I wonder what mare's nest you will be discovering next. An organization working in secret, you say, for the destruction of the existing order. To what end, then? To what end?"

"So that they may rebuild it — by their lights — on a nobler plan."

"I am to believe, then, that men of birth, such as the Cardinal-Prince de Rohan, the Prince de Soubise, the Duc de Chartres, Monsieur de Vergennes, and many more of their kind, are conspiring for their own overthrow. That is what you invite me to believe. My dear Bazancourt, it does not make sense. I shall end by asking myself whether so bright an intelligence as yours is not wasted in my dull department."

It was precisely what Bazancourt was beginning to ask himself. But he practised patience under the ironic glance of the Lieutenant-General's eyes, so very reminiscent of a frog's.

"Does Your Excellency know how many degrees there are in this Coptic Freemasonry?"

"I care not if there be a thousand."

"There are not quite so many. But there are many more than the three with which the noblemen you name are allowed to become acquainted. These three degrees, with their Egyptian ritual and their fantastic mummeries, supply a convenient façade, behind which, in the higher degrees, the sinister real work of the revolutionaries is secretly performed."

For a moment de Crosne was serious. "You will have proof of this? You have been initiated to these higher degrees?"

"Not yet. But I am seeking initiation, so that I may confirm these suspicions."

The Minister took him up on the word. "Suspicions! Death of my life! Shall I bring a storm about my ears from nobility of France, whom this charlatan amuses, upon no better grounds than those of your suspicions? You are out of your senses, I think. You'll bring me something better than that before I incommode Monsieur de Cagliostro."

Bazancourt departed in wrathful determination to confront the Lieutenant-General with evidence of his abounding fatuity. In quest of it you behold him some weeks later mingling in the fashionable crowd that paid court to Cagliostro in his startlingly appointed house in the Rue St. Claude.

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The mystagogue was holding a reception in the spacious sybaritic salon that provided so subtle and suggestive a setting for his peculiar genius, blending the crafts of East and West in French marqueterie and rugs from Smyrna and Ispahan, and symbolizing the wisdom of antiquity by, here, a statue of Isis, and, yonder, a bust of Hippocrates upon a Louis Quinze console. He was receiving his noble following for the particular purpose of doing honour to Houdon, and admiring the imposing bust of himself which that famous sculptor had just completed.

Of middle height and stocky build, with the shoulders of an Atlas, the mystagogue bore in his person the coarseness of a Calabrian peasant with the majesty of an emperor. His dress was an aesthetic outrage. Over a scarlet waistcoat and scarlet breeches, he wore a grey velvet coat that was heavy with gold. Valuable Spanish lace foamed at his wrists and throat; diamonds sparkled on his breast, on his fingers and on the buckles of his shoes in a profusion that served to remind the world that he possessed the secret of their manufacture. Without fineness of feature, yet his countenance was of a bold, commanding power that compelled the veneration he enjoyed. And this not merely from frivolous, sensation-loving women, such as Mesdames de Polignac, de Choiseul, D'Avrincourt, and the like, who hung spellbound upon his utterances, but from men of great positions in the world, the Cardinal-Prince de Rohan, the Prince de Soubise and a dozen others scarcely less eminent.

As suited the occasion, it was of art that the Master discoursed, in his queer Italianate French that at times was difficult to follow. He talked of Leonardo, of Michelangelo, and even of Praxiteles, as if he had personally known them in former avatars. He repeated sayings which he attributed to one or another of them; he disclosed secrets hitherto unpublished which he seemed to imply that he had observed in their working methods. Thus he entranced his audience by these fresh revelations of a knowledge so vast that it seemed to encompass all Creation.

In Houdon he declared, with a hand affectionately poised upon the embarrassed sculptor's shoulder, that the spirit of Donatello lived again. In fact, he seemed to hint that the Florentine had been reincarnated in the Frenchman. Like Donatello, Houdon possessed, he pronounced, the uncanny art of endowing inert bronze or marble with the very quality of life. He reminded his gaping listeners that when Pope Clement had seen Houdon's St. Bruno, he had exclaimed: "He would speak if it were not that the rules of his order impose silence."

"And you may say the same of this," he told them, pointing dramatically to the bust of himself.

This, at least, was true, thought Bazancourt. For Houdon had produced a head so vital that, had it been tinted, it might have passed for living flesh and bone.

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With amazing insight and clarity, Cagliostro went on to expound the difference between art, such as Houdon's, and mere craftsmanship, such as that of some others whom he mentioned; and then, the better to illustrate his meaning, he exhibited some grotesque masks in wax that Houdon had modelled for the amusement of the Master. Among them was a death-mask of Rousseau that sent a shiver through those who beheld it, and drew from Monsieur de Soubise the comment: "So horribly natural that it scarcely seems a mask. Rather is it as if the actual dead face had been sliced off."

Then Cagliostro was garrulously expounding art in Greece and art in Rome, and came by way of this to other Roman matters, all in that manner of reminiscence which enthralled his disciples and irritated the sceptic Bazancourt.

The Lieutenant-General's agent, however, found a salve for this irritation in the propinquity of the Countess of Cagliostro. For a month now he had been paying her a flagrant court. Few scruples ever troubled Monsieur de Bazancourt; none where a woman was concerned. It was among his failings that he suffered from a temperament so ardent as never to be happy unless offering himself as a willing victim upon the altar of Aphrodite. And whilst he may have deluded himself that it was sound strategy to approach the Grand Copht's secrets obliquely through the lovely Countess, it is just as possible that Serafina de Cagliostro's beauty, acting upon his susceptibility, had inspired him with this rather ignoble line of attack. Imperceptibly, however, he had reached a stage where his audacious love-making was in danger of becoming an end in itself. And his conduct was being noticed more than he suspected. No longer did he join the fashionable parade along the Cours la Reine in the elegant phaeton which it had been his habit to drive. Instead he displayed himself there on horseback, obviously so that he might enjoy the closer company of the lovely Serafina de Cagliostro, whose mornings were so frequently devoted to riding *en amazone*. And his relations with her, in a measure as they increased in intimacy, drew him further away from the object he had started out to serve. When he remembered it, he persuaded himself that he merely awaited opportunity; that he must not scare the game by too brusque an approach. As it happened, opportunity too clear to be neglected presented itself now as he leaned upon the lady's chair.

Cagliostro's discourse on ancient Rome and Romans had led the Master to talk of Pontius Pilate.

"The fact is," boomed the sonorous voice, "that he was not the man for Judea. His Roman tolerance was marred by Roman pride. He was too limited in the extent to which he could suffer the Jews to pursue ideals different from those in which he had, himself, been reared." The theurgist's uncanny eyes, so bright and terrible in their

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magnetic power, were dimmed as if by retrospection. "On that fateful day I warned him that if he washed his hands he would bestow upon his name a detestable immortality. I see him now, a comely, portly man, the very incarnation of calm authority, in his purple-bordered toga, bending in full view of that howling, unclean multitude over the silver basin that was proffered by a kneeling slave. Alas! Alas! Had he but heeded me — had the Great Architect of the Universe so willed it — how different an edifice would history have built."

He ended on a sigh, and like an echo of it a shivering rustle ran through the awed listeners. Then, as he ceased, and the spell was lifted, a growing hum of conversation followed. Under cover of it, Bazancourt, who had perceived his cue, spoke softly into the ear of the Countess.

"Surely it cannot lie in the Divine Will that mankind shall continue to groan in chains that are of Man's forging. Surely the end must be near." There was a passionate earnestness in his voice which she had never heard before. "Surely redemption must be at hand for the people who sweat and writhe under the heel of oppression. To help it forward would be a man's work in the world."

She was looking up at him out of her lovely, delicate, almost childlike, face, and the candid blue eyes, over the colour of which duels had been fought, were wide and round with wonder.

"You take me by surprise, sir. These feelings, this perception of the sufferings of humanity."

She was nibbling at the bait, he thought. He put on a countenance of wistfulness. "I am perhaps not as shallow as I seem, nor so concerned with selfish interests that I can behold without anger so much cruelty, injustice and tyranny. Ah, but forgive the transgression into which my emotions have betrayed me."

"They are emotions that do you honour," she murmured, still regarding him. "They deepen my esteem for you."

Thus encouraged he proceeded. Who that had a heart could remain indifferent to these wrongs? It was time, high time, that men of sensibility should organize themselves to regenerate society.

Her wonder seemed to increase. "You perceive that, too? But perhaps you are not alone in perceiving it." She lowered her voice to a confidential note, "Do you know that this organization does not exist already?"

He assumed the question to be something more than rhetorical. "What do you tell me?" he cried, like a man in whom a great hope is suddenly aroused.

The outburst brought her to her feet. Slim and straight at his side, she set a delicate curbing hand upon his satin sleeve. "Sh! No more now. It is not the moment. And the Master is watching us." She sighed. "Jealousy is the one human weakness that lingers in that great soul. But I shall ride to-morrow morning. If we should

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meet we can talk of this again."

Bazancourt departed that day from the Rue St. Claude in the conviction that the first step was taken towards the lifting of the veil. If he rightly gauged Cagliostro's methods, the Countess would now inform her husband that in Bazancourt he possessed a likely proselyte, and his initiation to those suspect higher degrees of Coptic Freemasonry would be considered. To gather the fruits of his scheming he rode forth on the morrow's fair Spring morning, very brave in his best coat of a becoming royal blue.

He had gone the length of the Cours la Reine and was approaching the Bois before he espied the Countess. She rode, as usual, her mettlesome white Arab, and was followed at a respectful distance by the Sicilian groom, Pasquale, whose devotion to his mistress had been fortified of late by Bazancourt's bribes. The grace of her supple figure, and the mastery with which she sat her horse, proved so inflaming a sight to him that when he had overtaken her, and they were moving gently side by side, his discourse was of anything but the Rights of Man. The susceptible Bazancourt's ultimate object was again obscured by the immediate joys her presence gave him. So far did he push audacity that at last she reproved him.

"Was it for this foolishness that we were to meet to-day, monsieur?"

"Foolishness? Cruel! Is my love a foolishness?"

"You are not to talk to me of love, sir. You do not know the dangers you incur."

"Say that I do not heed them . . . ."

"But you must. You must remember that I am the wife of Count Cagliostro. Gentle, benign, divinely kindly as he is, he is yet the master of terrible powers, which it would be madness to provoke."

Monsieur de Bazancourt became suitably lyrical. "If he were master of the lightnings, with power to blight me, yet the torment in my soul must find expression. Serafina! Deep calls to deep. A passion such as mine cannot leave you untouched."

"It must, my friend. It must!" And she added, sadly grave, "For both our sakes."

"Ah! But that is almost an admission."

"Never! It is not." The protest was on such a wailing note that it confessed the very opposite. Then, suddenly mastering herself, "Come, my friend," she bade him. "Help me to be strong. We were to be serious to-day. We were to think not of ourselves, but of the millions groaning in the chains of servitude."

"Ah, yes," he said, and sighed, aghast almost at the reluctance which he discovered in himself to cross the threshold which yesterday he had been so jubilant to have reached.

Perhaps it was just because of this mood of his, this amorous obscuring of his real aims, that the interview proved barren. Taken in the toils he had so artfully spread, his enthusiasm as a policeman was dimmed by his

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enthusiasm as a lover. He probed with clumsy abruptness. "You were to tell me of the organization that is to mend these ills."

She turned her graceful head to face him. "I was to tell you that?" Amazement stressed her question. "You have dreamt, my friend. Could I tell you what I do not know?"

"Did you not say that the organization exists?"

"No, no. I asked you did you know that it does not. For well it may. The Count holds in his great wisdom that every action brings its own reaction. When an evil becomes overwhelming it creates its own remedy."

"And that is all?" he asked. "Is it no part of the Master's benevolent mission to lead in this holy work, in which I would so gladly co-operate?"

"I will tell him what you say. He will, at least, admire your altruism."

It was not an answer. But, growing cautious, he would press no further. He had said enough. The next move must come from the other side.

What came, at dusk, on the evening of the morrow, was an urgent note from the Countess left at his lodging in the Chaussée d'Antin by Pasquale, the groom.

Dear Friend (she wrote in a straggling hand that was in itself an evidence of distress), *I am in great trouble and most urgent need. If the half is true of the feelings you profess for me, you will come at the earliest moment.*

Serafina.

That cry quickened his pulse. If hitherto he had sought Serafina sometimes as the policeman, sometimes as the lover, it was as both that he sought her now.

He was admitted to the house in the Rue St. Claude, not by the gigantic turbaned Negro, who was Cagliostro's usual doorkeeper, but by the confidential Pasquale, who bade him go up unannounced to the waiting Countess.

He beheld her on the dimly-lighted landing, coming to meet him, all in white. As he climbed the last step of the stairs, she flung herself forward and collapsed against him. He caught the slight, lissom body in his arms, and, intoxicated by that contact, hitherto so ardently but so vainly desired, he held her close and kissed her by sheer force of instinct. She was trembling violently as she yielded him her lips.

"You love me, Armand?" she murmured. It was the first time that she uttered his name. "Say it! Say it, for pity's sake!"

It was certainly not the policeman who answered hoarsely: "I worship you, my angel."

"I am in such need of you," she moaned. "Tell me that I can depend upon you. Trust you."

"To the death," said Bazancourt in his intoxication, and would have kissed her again, but that now she stayed him.

She disengaged herself from his clasp. "Hush, my friend. Wait. Come with me."

She took him by the hand, and, with steps that faltered and stumbled,

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led him forward, whilst he, like a somnambulist submissive to her will, went blindly.

She opened a door and drew him over the threshold of a room that was dimly lighted by only two candles in ormolu sconces on the brocaded wall. In the room's middle Bazancourt beheld a great bed under a silken rosy canopy. Towards this, Bazancourt, in amazement, with quickened pulses, suffered himself very willingly to be drawn by the fingers that encircled his wrist and the gently murmured, "Come, my dear."

Having reached the bed, she paused a moment, hesitating, her hand upon the curtain. Then, with abrupt violence, she tore it aside, and Bazancourt, suddenly disillusioned and sobered by horror, wrenched himself from her grasp, and leaned forward to stare in the dim light at the thing she had unveiled.

Supine upon the bed lay the sheeted bulk of Cagliostro. His face and hands alone were laid bare, but it needed no more than a glance to reveal not only that he was dead, but also how he had died. From between the slits of half-closed lids the eyes that in life had been so compelling stared now in vitreous, imbecile fixity from a countenance that was leaden-hued, and wore about the blue-lipped mouth the grin of rigor. His hands, like hands of yellow wax, emerging from beruffled sleeves, were folded upon the bulky chest, almost touching the gold hilt of the dagger that had been plunged into his breast. About it a reddish viscous stain had spread and gleamed now in the twilight of the guttering candles.

Mechanically the stricken Bazancourt leaned further forward, and touched one of those hands. Its cold clamminess sent a shudder through him. It told him that the Count must have been dead some hours. He would have carried investigation further, but the Countess, as if unable to bear more, pulled him away, and, thrusting herself between him and the bed, drew the curtains again so as to shut out that dreadful sight.

With her shoulders to that background of rosy silk she faced Bazancourt, her pallor scarcely less than that of the corpse. Her voice came hoarse and strangled at first, a vague moan that only gradually assumed coherence.

"You have seen, my friend. Dead! Dead! He boasted that neither steel nor poison could touch his immortality. Yet this poor weak hand sufficed to quench it."

"You!" Bazancourt's tall, graceful figure seemed to shrink. Horror made him crouch a little. "You killed him? You!"

Her answer stunned what little sense remained in him. "Because of you, Armand. For your sake. For your honour, which he insulted. I could not bear it, my love. It made me mad. I struck without knowing what I did. Our rides had been reported to him. He suspected us. He accused us of betraying him. That I could have borne. But when his jealousy drove

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him the lengths of saying you were a creature of de Crosne's, that I had taken a mouchard, a spy, for my lover, that affront to you was more than I could suffer. And so . . . And so . . ." She broke down, sobbing, and staggered helplessly towards him.

His arms received her, but not his heart. This had been turned to lead. She had killed Cagliostro because he had said that Bazancourt was a catchpoll. She had killed him because of her faith in Bazancourt. He was shamed by consciousness of how he had abused that faith, so that it was almost as if his own hand had driven that dagger into Cagliostro's heart. The policeman in him, aroused by the first glimpse of that corpse, was thrust out now, and not by the lover, but by the accomplice, shamed and conscience-stricken.

He perceived how, by making love to the woman so that he might spy the better upon the husband, he had aroused in her an unsuspected passion that had brought her into mortal jeopardy.

"What is to be done?" he groaned, and beat his brow with his clenched fist. "Ah Dieu! What is to be done?"

"You will save me, Armand?" she moaned. "You must save me. You must."

This was just what he was telling himself that he must do. "Why, yes. But how? How? There is this body." He was suddenly inspired. "Could it be suicide? Let me look again."

He made to put her from him. But she clung. "No, no! I cannot bear it! No pretence will serve. If I am questioned when they find him I shall break down and betray myself. I know I shall. I am weak. Terribly weak, Armand. He must disappear. I will give out that he has gone away; gone abroad on a sudden summons, on a sudden duty of his lofty mission. It has always been his way to appear and disappear mysteriously. That is known. People will not wonder unduly."

"Yes, yes." Bazancourt was almost impatient. "But how? How disappear? How are we to get rid of this?"

"That is where I need your help," she whimpered. "You must take him away."

"I!" He recoiled, aghast. "Take him away? Take him where?"

"Listen! Listen!" She wrung her hands. "Be calm, Armand. Be yourself, for pity's sake. Listen. There is your phaeton. You could carry him away in that, away into the country, and there dispose of him. There is the river. And no one will ever know. Only Pasquale. He will help. I can trust him. There are no other servants in the house to-night. I have thought of all. You will do this, Armand, my love. You will do this for me, who killed him for you. Afterwards, my love, there is nothing . . . nothing I will refuse you."

But Bazancourt was no longer to be moved by such a promise. Horror had withered all desire. The will to help her had basis for only the responsibility she thrust upon him for what had happened. And even this will to

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help her shrank before the terrible difficulties and dangers it involved. How could he hope, undetected, to convey a corpse out of Paris in a phaeton? How hope, undetected, to dispose of it afterwards? And if he were caught with such an evidence of crime, what did she conceive must happen to him? Frenziedly he voiced these questions. She amazed and horrified him by the promptness of an answer which showed him how well and coldly she had considered all.

She pointed to a great chest curiously wrought of iron that stood against a wall, an Italian wedding-coffer. The body, she said, could be packed into it, and so conveyed to some convenient, lonely spot where road and river met, or from some bridge that at night would be untenanted. It could be dropped into the water never to be seen again.

In mounting anguish, Bazancourt argued, first recoiling from the task, and then, finally, with an abrupt, frantic yielding to her wild supplications, he ordered her to set about emptying the chest so that he might thrust the body into it.

"Leave that to me," she answered him. "Let that be my part, with Pasquale to help me. It will save precious time, for we can do it while you are gone. Heaven bless you, my Armand, my love. I knew that you would not fail me." She was thrusting him towards the door as she spoke. She was all impatience, now that he had consented, to have him fetch his carriage without the least delay. "Lose no time," she admonished him. "Every moment that passes increases the danger of discovery. Go, my dear. Make haste, for pity's sake."

He took himself off at last upon that errand with wits as muddled as a drunkard's. Here, he told himself, was a fine end to his adventure, to the investigations that were to unmask a vast conspiracy and shame the harsh complacency of Monsieur de Crosne. As a result of mixing love-making with police work, he had made himself an accessory to a murder. And because a woman with a face of child-like innocence, who was yet capable of driving a poniard into a man's vitals, told him that the murder had been committed for his sake, here was he risking ruin and the hangman. Let him but win safely out of this, and he would order himself differently in future.

Thus Armand de Bazancourt that time he went from the Rue de St. Claude and returned to it within the hour in the gay phaeton that was to do duty as a hearse.

All was ready when he arrived. Pasquale, wooden-faced, was waiting in the vestibule with the Italian wedding-chest which had now become a sarcophagus. Between them they hoisted it to the floor of the carriage. The Countess did not appear, and for this, at least, Bazancourt was thankful. His most ardent wish was that he might never set eyes on her again, and nothing was further from his chilled mind than to claim from her fulfilment of the promise to re-

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ward this loathly service that he rendered her.

His whip cracked, and he rolled away through the night, down the Rue St. Denis, and along the Faubourg St. Honoré, to be halted at last by the closed gates of the Barrier of the Roule. His summons to the guard to open for him was loud and peremptory.

A sergeant emerged from the guard-house. Lanterns gleamed about the phaeton, and then came questions. Whither was monsieur going at this hour?

Bazancourt was hotly indignant. "What's that to you, my man? What's this impertinence? Unbar the gate at once, or I'll make you smart for your officiousness."

The sergeant was calmly remonstrative. "I do no more than my duty. Orders are to allow no one to pass the barrier to-night without giving an account of himself."

"What are you telling me? What orders are these?"

"From His Majesty's Lieutenant-General, himself, if you must know. They have just been issued."

Bazancourt ground his teeth, but more in scorn than fear. Here was another of these petty enactments with which de Crosne irritated the world whilst ignoring the underground ferment that threatened to engulf them all.

He answered irritably, "Such orders do not apply to me. I am Armand de Bazancourt, of the Lieutenant-General's own department, and I am going to St. Cloud about my business. Now open the gate. I am late already."

But his peremptoriness made no visible impression upon the stolidity of the sergeant. A lantern was thrust within the phaeton. Its light gleamed upon the iron chest. "What have you there, monsieur?"

"A box, fool. Can't you see?"

"Oh, ah, I can see. And what do you carry in it, if you please?"

"What do I carry in it? My effects, of course."

"To be sure. But I'll have to see them. Pray give yourself the trouble of opening the box."

"Open . . . ?" Bazancourt was suddenly in a cold sweat. "Name of God, my lad, you exceed your authority. I've told you who I am. Enough of this! Unbar the gate."

"Patience, monsieur! Patience! There has been a robbery. And we're to let no one out of Paris without making sure that he's not the thief."

"Ah! You take me for a thief now! What's your name? By God, I'll have you broken for this."

The sergeant was stirred out of his phlegm. "That's enough! That's enough! You'll open that box, or I'll treat you same as if you were the thief; that is, take you straight to the Lieutenant-General. Those are my orders. So open the box if you want to get to St. Cloud to-night."

"That I shall certainly not. We'll report to His Excellency by all means, and you'll see what'll happen to you for delaying me."

His fears had been lifted from him.

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He had but to show himself to Monsieur de Crosne, and there would be an end to any question of investigating his luggage. The Lieutenant-General was not likely to take his assistant for a thief.

So, with a couple of guardsmen in the phaeton, seated on the accursed chest, Bazancourt drove back as far as the Rue St. Honoré where the minister dwelt.

The Swiss doorkeeper, to whom Bazancourt was well known, dispatched a lackey with his message to the Lieutenant-General, and, after the shortest of delays, Monsieur de Crosne came to him in the little office on the ground floor where he waited.

"But what is this, my dear Bazancourt?"

Bazancourt explained. The Minister raised his brows.

"Surely, my friend, it would have been easier to open the box than give yourself the trouble of being brought back here, so that I may speak for you."

"That perhaps. But, then, the indignity of it. To submit me, a member of Your Excellency's department, to be searched."

"You must be patient with the sergeant. He had only your word for it that you are one of my lieutenants. Of course I sympathize with your repugnance to have a common fellow fingering your effects. Quite. So natural, after all."

"Your Excellency is always so understanding. If you will say a word to these guards now I will remove the inconvenience of my presence."

"Of course. Of course. But I think . . ." He paused, taking his lip between finger and thumb. "We had better see this box. You would not object to my looking through it? A mere formality."

"Yourself?" Bazancourt's mouth fell open and remained so.

De Crosne was apologetic. "The person robbed is a man of consequence," he explained. "And he is in great distress. He is here in my house now, awaiting the result of my measures. After all, I must respect the regulations I have made, must I not? So we'll have the box in and in five minutes, my dear Bazancourt, you will be able to resume your journey."

He waddled to the door to give his orders, whilst Bazancourt stood petrified. He came back, rubbing his hands. He was jocular. "It shall never be said of me that a law-maker is a law-breaker. I must see my own regulations upheld. But a mere formality, my dear fellow. A mere formality."

Bazancourt, still inarticulate, cursed him in his heart. It was characteristic of the pettifogging idiot to be so fatuously obedient to the letter of his imbecile enactments. With ruin grinning at him from the shadow of the gallows, Bazancourt mopped his wet brow as the two soldiers staggered in with the box.

De Crosne waved them out, and stood for a moment staring at the chest. "Do you know that it is uncommonly like the description of the coffer that has been stolen? No won-

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der the sergeant was so insistent. However, if you'll unlock it, we shall soon be done."

"Unlock it?" Bazancourt glared wildly from a face that was of the colour of chalk. "I . . . I have not the key." This was as truthful as it sounded foolish.

"You have not the key? Of your own box? But, my friend!" The minister stared at him. He was fingering his lip again. "Hum! Ha! I wonder, now." He went to the door again, uttered an order to the Swiss outside and stood waiting, whilst Bazancourt, sick and faint, leaned for support against the marble overmantel.

Brisk steps approached and paused beyond the threshold. When Monsieur de Crosne turned at last and half-closed the door, he carried a key in his hand. He went to the box again, and stooped over it.

"It fits!" he cried. "Now this is very strange." The lock clicked, and as the Lieutenant-General straightened himself, he flung back the lid.

Bazancourt sprang forward with a cry of terror that froze on his lips. Monsieur de Crosne had tossed a coverlet from the contents and he was taking out some of these: an épergne, a salver, a silver bowl, a pair of massive candlesticks, another salver and, beyond these, Bazancourt caught the gleam of more silver, partially swatched, so as to prevent it from rattling.

Bazancourt stared aghast, too amazed even to experience relief. By what miracle, he asked himself, had this come about? By what magic had the corpse of the murdered Cagliostro become transmogrified into a parcel of household silver?

De Crosne was calling, "Are you there, Monsieur le Comte? Come in, sir. Come in."

And now, as if there were not mystery enough already, the body of Cagliostro surged upon the threshold. But it was alive, this body which an hour ago his own eyes had seen dead, his own touch had verified to be cold. The portly figure in its grey velvet coat, with a blazing star of diamonds upon that breast which Bazancourt had seen transfixed by a dagger, advanced solemnly. He carried his plumed three-cornered hat tucked under his arm. His majestic head was thrown back, his bold, magnetic eyes were stern.

Passing from one terror to another, Bazancourt gulped and stared, and then told himself this was all an evil dream. Dimly he heard the voice of de Crosne.

"Will you be good enough to verify if this is your property, Monsieur le Comte. But of course it must be since your key fits the lock."

"Of course," boomed the deep voice. "Per Bacco! That is proof enough, I think. And in Monsieur de Bazancourt's possession, as I foretold. Your Excellency would not believe in my clairvoyance."

De Crosne was measuring his lieutenant with an eye in which there was no affection, and only now did it dawn on Bazancourt that the earlier smooth-

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ness had been that of the cat that toys with the mouse it means to slay.

"Without doubt there will be some explanation," said his frigid Excellency.

Bazancourt had a difficulty with his strangled throat. "Why . . . why, I am as astounded as Your Excellency," he contrived at last. "There . . . there has been some mistake. The box . . ." Words failed him.

"A mistake!" boomed Cagliostro. "Ah, Cospetto! A mistake, indeed." He squared himself before the stricken man. He assumed the mantle of the thaumaturge. "In my understanding of the human heart and of human weakness I can forgive you that you made love to my wife. She is of a beauty to turn heads less empty than your own. Knowing the lengths to which temptation will urge a needy man, I can forgive you that you stole my silver. But that you should have made love to my wife merely as a means to win into my house and steal my silver, that is the abomination that I can never forgive."

"It is not true!" screamed Bazancourt from the depths of his despair.

"Not true?" Cagliostro's great eyes seemed to dilate. "Can you explain how else my silver comes to be in your possession? If so, here is Monsieur de Crosne to hear you. Tell him."

He could explain, of course. But only in part; for how Cagliostro, whom he had certainly seen dead, had come to life again went beyond the horizon to which his sight was limited, unless the mystagogue possessed, indeed, the gift he claimed of immortality. But who would credit so crack-brained a tale? And even if it should be made credible, dare he assert that he had been a willing accessory to a murder?

He perceived that Cagliostro mocked him, just as he perceived the motives from which the Man of Mystery had acted. Made somehow aware of Bazancourt's connection with the Ministry of Police, and suspecting the aims of his espionage, the mystagogue, with the assistance of that traitress, Serafina, had gone about encompassing his ruin. So much was clear enough. What still remained to bewilder Bazancourt was Cagliostro's resurrection. He was to brood over it in the unhappy days that followed, viewing again in imagination that leaden-hued countenance with its glazed eyes and rigor-grin, those waxen hands that had been so cold to his touch. And then the very image that his thought employed brought light. Waxen hands. Wax. Suddenly he remembered the wax masks of Houdon's fashioning, and in particular the tinted death-mask of Rousseau which had sent a shiver through those who beheld it, and of which Soubise had said that it was as if the actual dead face had been sliced off.

Bazancourt, you see, had vision, as I began by asserting, and a gift of inference which might, had his temperament been less ardent, have made him one of the ornaments of the profession from which he was now cast out.

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L'AFFAIRE ANTOINE

by PIERRE BOILEAU

(Translated by Anthony Boucher)

Suzanne Ruchet vanished on Monday, October twelfth. . . . She lived with her younger sister Adèle in a middle-class apartment in the Ternes district. She was an independent soul, and her job as representative of a cosmetics firm meant frequent travel. So there was nothing unusual in her spending a night away from home; but never before had she failed to forewarn her sister.

It was not until Wednesday that Adèle began to worry seriously. She phoned the factory that employed Suzanne, and was told that the firm not only had not sent Mlle. Ruchet on any trip, but was astonished at her absence from the office, where a mountain of letters dictated on Monday still awaited her signature.

Perturbed, Adèle set to rummaging about in her sister's room and rapidly ascertained that she had not taken a suitcase, nor even the small overnight bag. An inventory of the closet disclosed the scantily helpful clue that she had been wearing her green and chestnut ensemble and her raincoat. A possibly more significant item was that she had carried her new alligator-skin handbag, reserved for special occasions, and left her old bag behind.

Adèle opened the old bag mechanically, without hope. But when she saw her sister's engagement-book, she hastily flipped the pages to Monday, October twelfth. That page bore a single word, the name Antoine, without even an indication of the time.

Antoine!

That name instantly recalled a tall, blond (and very dull) fellow who had been engaged to Suzanne the year before. There had not been any mention of Antoine Piédelièvre since the engagement had been broken — an outcome which Adèle, for her part, had devoutly welcomed; she couldn't bear the man. How Suzanne had ever seen anything in . . . And that awful Sunday (the only one, thank Heaven) when he invited them both to his little country house, *Gai Séjour*, in Valmondois . . . is there anything more totally dull and vulgar than people in love?

Antoine Piédelièvre! Could Suzanne possibly have taken up with him again? Of course, it might be some completely different Antoine. . . .

Adèle Ruchet decided to wait until that evening before making up her mind. But by the middle of the afternoon she was on her way to the police station.

Louise Héraud vanished on Wednesday, October fourteenth. . . .

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She had no family and lived alone. She was a saleswoman in an exclusive candy shop on the Boulevard de la Madeleine.

Exactitude was her ruling characteristic. So when she failed to appear at work on the morning of Thursday the fifteenth, her employer decided she must be ill. She sent a girl to Louise's rooms and received the report that no one answered the bell and that the concierge had heard nothing from her tenant concerning either an illness or an intended absence.

When the candy shop closed, the shopkeeper herself went to her employee's rooms. Once more there was silence behind the locked door; and the concierge began to give voice to the direst suppositions. "Sometimes a heart attack . . ."

The two uneasy women called the police.

The police called a locksmith.

The apartment was tiny, tastefully furnished, in perfect order, and empty. One glance was enough to establish that Louise Héraud had not spent the night at home. But as to where she might have spent it, there was only one faint hint: The firescreen had not been replaced in front of one fireplace. In the grate was a scanty heap of ashes. Among the ashes was a small, crumpled, yellowed triangle of paper spared by the flames.

The inspector found a pair of eyebrow tweezers on the dressing table and plucked out the triangle. It was the corner of an envelope, complete with stamp and postmark, which the inspector could barely decipher as

Valmondois — Seine et Oise

"It was probably you," he asked the concierge, "who gave Mlle. Héraud this letter?"

"Yes, sir. It was in yesterday morning's mail. I noticed because I was so surprised to see 'Valmondois.' I thought that was all over."

"What was all over?"

"An . . . an affair of Mlle. Héraud's. Well, I shouldn't really say an affair, because at the time she told me she was going to get married. But I don't know how many months it is since she's had a letter from him and he never comes around any more. He was tall and blond — not bad-looking. . . ."

"You know his name?"

"Only his first name. One day Mlle. Héraud was saying goodbye to him in front of my loge and I noticed because it was the same name as my poor brother, God rest his soul —"

"And the name was —?"

"Antoine."

Valentine Pic vanished on Friday, October sixteenth. . . .

She was the widow of a senator and lived comfortably on the income from the securities left her ("for services rendered," as the more malicious had it) by a doddering husband who could easily have been her father. She had one servant, Marie.

On Saturday morning, at precisely nine as usual, Marie entered her mis-

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tress's bedroom bearing a tray with one cup of chocolate and two slices of buttered bread. The tray all but crashed to the floor when Marie discovered that the bed had not been slept in.

The circumstance was so fantastic that Marie at once summoned one of the highest officials of the Sûreté, whom she knew as one of Madame's intimate friends.

This time there was not even the faintest trace of a clue. But it was impossible not to connect the affair with the two recent disappearances, the inquiries on which were already yielding certain significant connections.

A police sergeant was sent to Valmondois with several photographs of Valentine Pic. He had had an embarrassment of riches to choose from; her drawing-room was all but literally wallpapered with portraits from the most renowned "Art Studios."

The second station employee whom he interrogated recognized the pictures.

"I should think I do recognize her! She got off here last night on the 10 o'clock train."

"You're being pretty cocksure. You can't have caught more than a glimpse of her."

The man smiled. "Let me explain. This lady, you see, couldn't find her ticket. She hunted for it. She *kept* hunting for it. . . ."

The policeman smiled. "I know how it is."

Then the sergeant went on to *Gai Séjour*, property of a certain Antoine Piédelièvre, whose name had been linked to the two preceding cases.

Gai Séjour was a rather isolated abode. Through the iron gates you could see the whole house, a typical suburban stucco villa in the purest 1900 manner. On the other three sides, however, the grounds were inclosed by high walls which prevented any indiscreet surveillance. The shutters were closed.

"Monsieur Piédelièvre?" said the nearest neighbor. "He's here regularly three days a week."

"And those three days are —?" the sergeant asked.

"Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays."

"So last night —?"

"He was there all right. He must have left for Paris in his car this morning, as usual."

The sergeant went back to the iron gates. Through them he stared at the symmetrical shrubs, the graveled walks, the shell borders. . . .

All at once he trembled. Barely two yards away, right at the mouth of that shell — that rectangle of pink cardboard. . . .

He did not hesitate. One quick look around at the deserted road and he was climbing the gate. It took less than half a minute. He had made no mistake: the tiny scrap of pasteboard was from a railroad ticket, and read:

Valmondois-Paris: Return

Instinctively, he sniffed at it. The faint perfume was easy to recognize;

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it was only a few hours since he had smelled it in the boudoir of Valentine Pic.

The next day at dawn this same sergeant, with two colleagues and a warrant, appeared at the Paris establishment of Antoine Piédelièvre, 6 Boulevard des Invalides.

A new *Affaire Landru* had begun.

At least so the journalists asserted, and so a sensation-hungry public repeated. But, in truth, "*L'Affaire Antoine*" was doomed to occupy a far more modest position in the annals of crime, particularly because of the restricted number of victims — three. The relations, moreover, of the accused with the vanished women, despite all efforts to establish the contrary, seemed to have been marked by a timid purity sorely disappointing to all the envious admirers of the Master.

Antoine Piédelièvre, 32, was tall, slender, blond, given to slow, precise movements, as though under a constant pressure to economize on his gestures, as well as on his words. His face was pale, his features undefined, his expression a blend of sad resignation and perpetual astonishment. It was only his eyes that you noticed, and they were oddly disquieting.

They were too light a blue, almost washed out. They were expressionless, dead, but never at rest. Only rarely would they fix on a thing or a person, and even then they seemed not to see. Or, rather, it was as if some obstacle intercepted their gaze, which came through weakened and remote. These lifeless, elusive eyes were not to make the case any the easier for examining magistrate Bilois.

But what completely baffled M. Bilois, and public opinion as well, was the behavior of the accused. Not for an instant did he abandon his serenity, his courtesy, his dignity. Not for an instant did he display a gleam of anger or even of impatience. To be sure, he insisted that he was innocent; but he did it quietly, even feebly, like a man worn and weary who has no more faith in himself than in others and who leaves it to Fate alone to look after his affairs.

Antoine Piédelièvre gave his name, age, and circumstances as if he were a government employee running through some routine formality. He had been clerk, then a buyer in a large export house; at present, he was an insurance salesman.

"Tell us about Mlle. Suzanne Ruchet."

"We met when I was in exports. She came to see me — to try to make a contact for the beauty products she handled. We got on well together; we became engaged. . . ."

"What broke it off? Why? When?"

"We decided to break off the engagement by mutual agreement after we knew each other a little better. Our attitudes toward life were not really compatible. We parted as good friends a little over a year ago."

"And since you broke up, have you ever seen Mlle. Ruchet again?"

"Never, sir."

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"Really? *Not even once?*"

"Not even once. What good would it be? Especially since meeting again would have produced a rather delicate, perhaps painful, situation: I had become engaged again almost at once."

"To Mlle. Louise Héraud?"

The eyes of Antoine Piédelièvre kept shifting from the window to the door in a regular, unbroken movement, like the eyes of spectators at a tennis match. Impartially, their gaze slid over the three green filing-cabinets, over the clerk at his ink-stained table, over the empty fireplace, over M. Bilois — who tried in vain to arrest them in midflight. The accused seemed to be answering the questions of someone whom he could not see.

Yes, he met Louise Héraud in the candy shop where she worked. He had come in to buy some chocolates for Suzanne Ruchet. He came back to try to sell insurance for the shop. Once more he had believed he had found a kindred spirit. Again he had made a mistake. They had both been mistaken. Fortunately, they had realized their mistake in time. No, he had never seen her again either.

"For the same reason, after all, sir," he added.

"You mean, by now you are engaged to Mme. Valentine Pic?"

The only difference from the two preceding episodes was that this time they had met again — "through friends." But the widow was eleven years older than Piédelièvere.

"At first I gave no weight to this difference in age. Valentine acted very young, she took good care of herself. . . . And then later I began to think about the years to come, and I understood the full tragedy of the situation. The question of children alone . . .! I explained it all to Valentine and I think she understood."

M. Bilois nodded. A glint of irony shone in his eyes. He could have smiled openly without being noticed by the accused.

"And this last separation was on —?"

"Easter Sunday, April the nineteenth. That is, almost exactly six months ago."

"And of course you have not seen Mme. Pic since?"

The accused answered by a shrug of the shoulders, to indicate that he considered the question superfluous.

The magistrate had listened to Antoine Piédelièvre's statements with an expression of indulgent malice. It was almost apologetically that he murmured, "Perhaps now would be the time for you to tell me specifically if any one of these ladies, if not all three, may not have been . . . a trifle more than a fiancée to you?"

"Just fiancées . . . nothing more. . . ."

M. Bilois' voice became suddenly more incisive. "I assume nevertheless that your fiancées had occasion, each in her turn and doubtless more than once, to visit your country establishment in Valmondois?"

"My property was to be theirs. Naturally they ——"

"Oh, naturally. Of course. Now

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from your preceding statements I may conclude that, dating from each breaking-off, none of the three ladies in question ever set foot again in *Gai Séjour*. Or, to speak bluntly, that *Gai Séjour* did not receive on the evening of October the twelfth a visit from Mlle. Suzanne Ruchet, nor on October the fourteenth a visit from Mlle. Louise Héraud, nor on October the sixteenth a visit from Mme. Valentine Pic."

For the first time, it was Antoine Piédelièvre's turn to employ irony. "Not that I noticed, sir."

"*You* were at Valmondois on the three evenings in question?"

"I always am on those days. It's an old habit. It was my parents' home; I was born there. But now that I have to give it up so soon ——"

"You *what*?"

"*Gai Séjour* simply isn't good enough for Françoise, and anyway she hates Valmondois. Oh, yes, I should have told you, sir: I'm engaged to Mlle. Françoise Géreuse. The daughter of the automobile manufacturer. Our banns have been published at the City Hall in the sixteenth district and at Saint Honoré d'Eylau. We are — that is, we were going to be married next Thursday."

M. Bilois was silent for some time. It was not so much the announcement of this fourth betrothal, unexpected though it was, that astonished him as the personality of the future Mme. Piédelièvre.

Everyone knew Françoise Géreuse, only daughter of the fabulously wealthy industrialist, heiress to one of the greatest fortunes in France — the ravishing Françoise Géreuse whose picture appeared regularly in newspapers and magazines to accompany the narrative of some new and costly eccentricity. The latest had been her début in a film which had provided the critics, for once unanimous, with an opportunity for certain unflattering comparisons between the automobile industry and the cinematographic industry.

The last eccentricity? Hardly, since now there was this coming marriage with . . .

The curiosity with which the magistrate studied the dull character seated before him was no longer even remotely professional. M. Bilois' features expressed a humiliating lack of comprehension.

Piédelièvre's expressionless voice was going on: "We met during my last vacation, on the way to Deauville. Our cars ran into each other. Mine ended up in a ditch. It was all Françoise's fault. She gave me a lift in her car. We saw each other again. And then . . ."

He broke off. The slight movement of his head, the modest smile, clearly indicated that he was the first to confess astonishment at the incredible boon bestowed upon him. . . .

Antoine Piédelièvre with a fourth bride — and the prospect of a spectacular marriage portion to boot! This seemed to cast a whole new light

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on the case — and in particular, to provide the hitherto incomprehensible motive.

It seemed obvious that somewhere in the past of "the Perpetual Fiancé" lay a dread secret which the three unfortunate women had succeeded in discovering in time, a secret which seemed to them to constitute an invincible barrier to marriage. Or even more probably, Suzanne Ruchet, the first fiancée, had discovered the secret on her own, then generously communicated it to the others, saving them from their unconjecturable fate. Though there was no evidence that the three women were acquainted, it was not in the least unlikely that they might have met, through Mlle. Ruchet's beauty products or Mlle. Héraud's candies de luxe.

And it was therefore to insure the silence of the three women that Piédelièvre had . . .

But what could be the nature of "The Secret"? Some past crime? Some monstrous physical or moral blemish?

M. Bilois submitted Antoine Piédelièvre to two thoroughgoing medical examinations. The results were disappointing, as were the reports of the psychiatrists.

The newspapermen besieged the Avenue du Maréchal Foch mansion of the notable industrialist and future father-in-law of the accused.

At first Françoise Gérause refused to receive them. But when she realized that her stubbornness only made things look blacker for her fiancé, she graciously consented to interviews and even called press conferences on her own. Her statements never varied: Antoine Piédelièvre was the victim of a stroke of fate as cruel as it was inexplicable. As to conceiving him as "blighted by some secret curse which sets him apart from mankind," that was flatly ridiculous!

But the *why* was not the only puzzle to be solved. What chiefly perplexed the investigators (as well as the public, which always prefers a concrete problem to a psychological one) was the *how* — how the presumptive murderer had managed in less than one week — in five nights and four days, to be precise — to do away completely with the bodies of three women.

Gai Séjour was searched minutely . . . and fruitlessly. As in Landru's villa at Gambais, or for that matter as in almost any country house, there was a kitchen stove. It was an impressive giant of a stove, almost of restaurant size, and full of ashes. The ashes were analyzed simply as a matter of form (how could anyone have accomplished a triple incineration in so short a space of time?); the results were negative.

Squads of policemen dug up every square foot of garden and cellar. Police dogs searched the neighboring woods. No result. And it was not forgotten that the accused owned a car. The nights are getting long in October; in some ten hours, who knows how far he might have traveled?

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Meanwhile, M. Bilois intensified his examinations. Relatives, friends, and acquaintances of the three victims and of their presumptive murderer streamed in and out of his office. Minor facts emerged to confirm the pattern by which "The Secret" had been imparted: Mlle. Ruchet was learned to have been fond of Mlle. Héraud's candies; Mme. Pic had been heard to endorse Mlle. Ruchet's beauty products. But no hint appeared as to the nature of "The Secret" itself, no intimation, to even the closest friend, of the precise reason for each broken engagement.

Even Adèle Ruchet, living day in and day out with her elder sister Suzanne, could say only that Suzanne had simply become "like a stranger" to her after meeting Antoine, and that the strangeness had persisted after the break-up.

Opinions on the accused largely coincided, though with certain varying nuances: "a taciturn fellow . . . disconcerting . . . tormented. . . ." A few went so far as "blasted hypocrite . . . capable of anything. . . ." But M. Bilois was inclined to view this as a judgment *a posteriori*.

As for the fair Françoise Géreuse, she exclaimed ecstatically: "A complex being! So different from the rest!" For the mystery surrounding her future husband endowed him, to her somewhat perverse taste, with an incomparable prestige.

And the duel began again:

"Piédelièvre, what explanation can you give, other than an appointment with you, for the entry of the name *Antoine* in Suzanne Ruchet's engagement book under the date of Monday, October twelfth, the day of her disappearance?"

"I have no explanation, sir."

"But it has been definitely established that your former fiancée never knew any other Antoine — only you."

"Who can establish any such thing? Who can be positive that he knows about all the people that I know . . . or that you know?"

The question seemed to be addressed less to the magistrate than to the fireplace.

"Let's go on to Mlle. Héraud. According to your own statements, she visited Valmondois only twice and never spoke to anyone there. Then who could have written her, *from Valmondois*, a letter so . . . so private in nature that she felt she should destroy it immediately? As, indeed, her prudent correspondent may have requested."

"I can only make the same answer, sir. Who can be positive that Mlle. Héraud knew no one else in Valmondois?"

"Lastly, how do you explain that a return ticket, still impregnated with the perfume of Mme. Valentine Pic, should have been found inside *your* locked gate, several hours after Mme. Pic left the train at the Valmondois station — as we were able to establish by a fortuitous incident, trifling in itself, *and unforeseeable by the murderer*?" M. Bilois began to lose his calm. "Yes, *unforeseeable*! Like

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the name in the notebook! Like the postmark that failed to burn!"

The inhuman calm of Antoine Piédelièvre was undisturbed. Quietly, as though he were speaking of a third person, he remarked, "It ought to be the duty of the police and not of the accused to explain things like that. On this point, the British concept of criminal law ——"

The magistrate changed his tactics. "But think of Mlle. Géreuse! You love her. She loves you. She suffers for you, with you. Do I need to tell you that certain crimes, no matter how horrible they may seem, have still found pardon before a jury that was made to understand the forces that drove a man to them?"

No trace of emotion appeared on Piédelièvre's colorless face. It still expressed nothing but an infinite weariness and boredom. His eyes, like those of the grotesque faces on some clock dials, persisted in their maddening shift to and fro.

The trial began on June twenty-fifth, in a heat which broke a fifty-year record for that date. It was Maître Fiduri, then at the height of his glory, who undertook the terrifying task of defending the accused.

The verdict was not in doubt. The only question was whether the sentence would be death or life at hard labor. The odds favored hard labor; the *why*, and above all the *how*, made serious gaps in the prosecution's case.

The trial lasted four days. The first three went by uneventfully in a sort of torpor induced by the tropical temperature. Antoine Piédelièvre was the same in the prisoner's box as in M. Bilois' office: at first, courteous and resigned; later, indifferent.

There were a great many witnesses. Their total testimony for three days added up to four words: "I don't know anything."

The courtroom was overcrowded and overheated. The air was unbreathable. Boredom began to afflict the spectators. It slowly spread to the judges' tribunal, to the prosecutor's chair, to the defense's bench.

The fourth and decisive day was also the hottest. A thunderstorm was in the offing. A sort of tepid mist clung to the skin. The Presiding Judge opened the proceedings by ordering the ejection of a young spectator in shorts and by commanding the men in shirt-sleeves to resume an appearance suitable to the dignity of a court of justice. There was nothing he could do about the rivulets pouring under his heavy robes.

The three prosecutors had at least the virtue of brevity. The first, delivering the funereal panegyric on Suzanne Ruchet, Louise Héraud, and Valentine Pic, found even his brevity falling on distracted ears. The public, the press, and even the jury seemed to have only so much attention to spare, and feared blunting it too early.

The requisitory — the formal demand for punishment, traditional in French procedure — fell far short of the expected vehemence. Crushed by the heat, haunted by fears of the in-

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sufficiency of his case, the chief prosecutor was like a boxer in bad condition, trying desperately to go the full fifteen rounds even if he's certain to lose on points. He spoke simply, as one man of common sense to another, even falling at times into colloquial speech.

The peroration was no better. Implacably phrased but forcelessly uttered in a dying *decrescendo*, it carried no effect. The slightest effort of the defense (thought such spectators as were capable of thinking at all) could save the day.

But it soon became clear that the great Maître Fiduri was incapable of even that slightest effort. He too was groggy, all but out on his feet. Crimson-faced, streaming sweat, the famous lawyer had to clasp the bar for support. His voice was toneless and seemed to come from far away. The most you could say for the beginning of his speech was that it seemed feeble even in contrast with the feebleness of the requisitory.

Meanwhile, the heat had reached its zenith. Suddenly there was a long, loud groan. An old lady had fainted. An attendant helped her out.

The flurry of interest died down. Maître Fiduri resumed his speech, and no one listened. Hardly anyone even noticed the return of the attendant, now surprisingly agitated. He plucked at Maître Fiduri's robe and whispered in his ear.

Suddenly the lawyer sprang back. He was trembling. His mouth opened, but no sound came out. Still speechless, he extended his arms toward the judges' tribunal.

At last his voice returned — not the toneless, faraway voice of a few moments past, but the ringing trumpet of his great days.

"I demand that the court summon immediately as a witness . . . *Mme. Valentine Pic!*"

M. Bilois, like the other hundreds, roused himself from his torpor to stare at the "old lady" who had fainted. The white wig was gone, and most of the make-up had vanished under the application of cold compresses. He knew the face at once. He saw that salon with its endless products of Art Studios, and he saw the newspapers that had reprinted the choicest ones so often that even a court attendant could recognize her instantly.

And he saw the other picture that had been staring him in the face: the picture of the whole case. The three ex-fiancées, gnawed by jealousy of the madcap heiress, leagued by hatred of the man who had enjoyed the preliminaries but had avoided the main event . . . all the evidence that had hinted at their possible acquaintance with each other. . . .

Well, M. Bilois reflected, he had been right in one thing. Their plot had been perfect — as perfect as the series of inexplicable murders they had attempted to foist upon that unaccountable devil Piédelièvre. But there's always that one unforeseeable factor — in "*L'Affaire Antoine*," a fifty-year-record heat wave. . . .

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T. S. Stribling is always completely fascinated with whatever literary task he sets for himself, and this rapt intensity shows in his work. During the creative processes he feels a great lift, almost an exaltation, while he ponders the particular scheme in his head. He is constantly annoyed with himself that he does not get on with it faster, but he knows from deep knowledge of himself that he cannot rush the growth of ideas, that he must wait for the unaccountables in his skull to tell him what to write. And always he feels in his bones that the new story, whatever it may ultimately deal with, however it may finally take shape, is something grand, something big, something exciting, something fresh . . .

Perhaps that accounts for the confession Mr. Stribling made to us when he sent in the manuscript of "The Mystery of Andorus Enterprises." T. S. wrote, quite unashamedly, that he was tiring of his old formula — murder, hunt, another murder, then discovery. He didn't tire of it because he no longer thinks it good: the classic sequence in the unfolding of the pure detective story is still capable of producing an infinite variety of stimulating ideas. No, the formula remains basically as effective as it was in Poe's inspired hands, or in Doyle's revivification; but Tom Stribling doesn't want his Poggioli investigations to run the slightest risk of becoming stereotyped. As Tom himself puts it: "I want to keep even my criminal mind flexible and sporting."

THE MYSTERY OF ANDORUS ENTERPRISES

by T. S. STRIBLING

THE tallish youth in the living room of our Acacia Street apartment asked Professor Henry Poggioli if he could tell by just looking at him who he was and what he wanted? Now a question like that, somewhat flattering and completely silly, irks me; but my friend took it as an opportunity for an exhibition.

"You want me to analyze *someone else* and you offer yourself as a test of my ability to deduce accurately?"

Our caller seemed slightly disappointed. "Naturally you would know that much."

"And you must be in a hurry or you would go about your mission more deliberately," continued Poggioli.

"Yes, that's true, I am in a hurry, I've got to get over to the . . ."

"And you have a sheaf of yellow second-sheets in your coat pocket, three lead pencils in your vest pocket,

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and your two forefingers are spatulate with their nails worn away. . . . The only persons who hurry out for copy, then hurry back and typewrite it with two forefingers, are newspaper reporters. You are out after some sort of story that has you puzzled. . . ."

"No, you're wrong there." The tall young man seemed pleased to have caught Poggioli in the wrong. "It's not a puzzling case at all — it's really a tear-jerker, but I'm not good at that sort of thing. I thought if you'd go with me and make some sort of mystery out of it. . . ."

The naïveté of the request surprised me. Poggioli, however, seemed interested.

"Just who are the principals of your story, Mr. ——"

"Gebhardt," supplied the young man. "The principals are a Mrs. Dawson and the Andorus Enterprises, Incorporated. It isn't a criminal action at all. The city court is investigating the qualifications of Andorus Enterprises to receive Mrs. Dawson's last baby and find a home for it. So you see, there is really nothing to the story, but I thought if I could get you to work up some sort of psychological angle . . ." He broke off vaguely.

"I don't know Andorus Enterprises."

Mr. Gebhardt was astonished. I interrupted to tell him that Poggioli read nothing in newspapers except the criminal news; then he analyzed the various crimes, figured out who did them, the criminals' motives, where they had fled, and so forth.

"How does he find out these facts?" asked the young journalist curiously.

"Oh, from the stories themselves, or by putting two or more stories together, or by reading the personal advertisements. But often, when there is a real mystery afoot, and because he is so widely known, somebody — an officer of the law or occasionally the criminal himself — will come here, give him all the facts, and ask him what to do."

Young Gebhardt was amazed. "Doesn't he ever double-cross the criminals and have them arrested?"

"Certainly not. They are merely pieces in a chess game to him."

"Then I'm sorry there is no mystery about Mrs. Dawson," he said regretfully.

Poggioli took up the conversation again.

"You say she is giving away her last baby? How many others did she have?"

"Nine, I believe. She's giving away her tenth because she and her husband can't support that many children."

The psychologist considered the point for a moment. "Doesn't that strike you as queer? — a couple giving away their tenth child because they can't support it?"

The youth thought for a moment, but finally said, "Why no-o. . . . I'm afraid it doesn't, sir."

"Don't you know that the first child any couple has is the most expensive to rear, the second less so, the third still less, and so on. Finally, when a woman has nine children, she

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can rear the tenth without any perceptible extra cost, beyond the hospital fees for her confinement. So to give away a tenth baby to save expense doesn't make sense."

The reporter was surprised at this commonplace reasoning. "Then I wonder why she is giving it away."

"That I don't know. What I find interesting is why you should come to me with a story that you obviously considered dull and hardly worth writing."

"Well, I . . . because it *is* dull, and I knew if anybody could make it interesting . . ."

"Oh, no, that won't do! Nobody seeks expert advice over trifles. If you don't consider the story of any importance, then, somehow, the actors in it are important to you."

"The actors!"

"Exactly. Something is important. . . ."

"Why, I never heard of Mrs. Dawson before! She's nothing but a scrubwoman in the Andorus Building. . . ."

"A scrubwoman in the Andorus Building is disposing of her child to Andorus Enterprises!"

"Yes, what of that?"

"Nothing at this moment. Let us continue with your own personal aversion to the story. Just what grudge have you got against Andorus Enterprises, Mr. Gebhardt?"

Mr. Gebhardt was astonished. "Why, nothing, what could I have?"

"That is what we are trying to fathom. In what business is this company, Andorus Enterprises, engaged?"

The reporter gave a brief smile of distaste. "It would be a lot easier to tell you what they don't do. They engage in semi-philanthropic works. They bought up a big slum area here in Tiamara and are building model housing for the colored. They have started to work on a stadium and are going to give the city professional football. They are back of a plan to build a glass subway under the bay to allow tourists to walk out to a submarine tea room, where they can drink cocktails and look at the fishes. Now, of course, their last project is to find homes for unwanted babies, so they start with their own scrubwoman, Mrs. Dawson."

From Gebhardt's manner and tone he might have been charging Andorus Enterprises with highway robbery.

"Well, what's the matter with all these things?" asked Poggioli curiously.

"Why, the company came from Central America!" exclaimed the reporter. "Imagine a Central American syndicate, backed by millions of dollars, coming here to . . ."

Poggioli dropped his hands. "I see what you mean."

I looked at my friend and said, "I don't."

The psychologist nodded slightly. "I am sure you don't," he answered me, "and I am also sure that neither does Mr. Gebhardt." Here he broke off into one of his professorial lapses. "As a matter of fact, gentlemen, this is one of the most extraordinary in-

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stances of subconscious logic — which we ordinarily call 'hunches' — that I have ever encountered."

I realized we were about to wander off into a long theory which I couldn't possibly use in my notes about the case — that is, if there *were* any case — so I said, "Don't tell us how Mr. Gebhardt's mind worked — just state the objection he had to Andorus Enterprises, and let it go at that."

Poggioli was dampened, but he continued. "Well, it's very simple. Central America is an undeveloped country. There is never a flow of capital from a province to an industrialized state such as ours; money always moves from centers of industry outward. Gebhardt felt that, and subconsciously he realized that Andorus Enterprises did not and could not originate in Central America. He felt they were sailing under false colors, which undoubtedly they are. So there lies the basis of his psychological aversion to the corporation, and why he came to me hoping I would be able to discover something — say, criminal — about the company."

Gebhardt was astonished at this analysis. I was amused and began to laugh. The reporter turned to me and inquired why I was laughing.

"Look at the situation, Mr. Gebhardt," I said. "What could be more absurd than to investigate this vague bugaboo, this international fraud, in the city court of Tiamara, on the tiny question of whether or not the company is competent to convey a child from the child's mother to adoptive parents. That is like pulling a tack out of a skyscraper and expecting the building to fall down — that is, if Poggioli's wild deductions are really true."

"My dear man," retorted Poggioli angrily. "I didn't say Mr. Gebhardt's subconscious plan was practical. Subconscious plans seldom are. I simply told you why he felt an antagonism to Andorus Enterprises, and my diagnosis is correct."

Young Mr. Gebhardt arose with a reporter's nervousness. "Gentlemen, this phase of the discussion is academic. I would like Professor Poggioli to honor me by accompanying me to the city court and analyzing Mrs. Dawson herself. If there really is a fox in the canebrake, nobody could scare it out as quickly as he."

The psychologist arose. "You are coming along?" he asked me.

"Oh, yes, I'll come along — but this is a waste of my time. I can't possibly work anything as simple as a baby-adoption case into a good salable mystery story."

Gebhardt laughed and Poggioli shrugged. The three of us went outside to a car the reporter had waiting.

On the way to the city court there developed what I am sure was the real reason for young Gebhardt's visit to Poggioli. He was fishing for a sensational twist to the Dawson adoption to compete with another reporter's story about the waterfront hotels. The other reporter was named Jenkins, and Jenkins had discovered that a yacht owner and his wife had come

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ashore and engaged the penthouse suite of the Del Mar Hotel for twelve hundred and fifty dollars a night.

That exorbitant price was all that Jenkins had at first, which on Tiamara Strand was not as startling as it sounds. But Jenkins had dug up the accessory fact that the yachting couple were suffering from a nervous breakdown, and that a Dr. Majoffsky had come to visit them at ten o'clock on the following morning.

As Gebhardt was telling us these facts, Poggioli interrupted. "I read that story in the morning's paper," he said, "that feature of it — the ten o'clock visit by Dr. Majoffsky. It aroused my curiosity."

Both of us looked blankly at Poggioli, as the reporter's jalopy trundled downtown toward the city court.

"What's odd about a doctor's call at ten o'clock in the morning?" I asked.

"Why didn't the sick couple go to a hospital? Why did Dr. Majoffsky call at the hour when most city practitioners receive patients in their offices? Family visits usually come before ten o'clock in the morning and after two in the afternoon."

"That's a rather farfetched question, don't you think, Poggioli?" I asked, somewhat ironically. "There's no ironbound rule about it. It just happened to be at ten o'clock in the morning. Maybe the yachting couple were late sleepers."

"Not with nervous prostration."

"What could the hour have to do with it?" inquired Gebhardt curiously.

"Mm — mm. . . . I hardly know . . . ten o'clock. . . . All I know about ten o'clock is that banks usually open at that time."

Both Gebhardt and I were astonished. "What could that possibly have to do with it?"

The psychologist stressed his points with his fingers. "Gentlemen, I haven't the faintest notion, and I will not surmise. A premature guess may throw us completely off the track, and we may never get on it again. No, the thing for us to do is to wait for the next bit of evidence and see how it . . ."

"But, Professor Poggioli," interrupted Gebhardt, "aren't we working on the Dawson adoption case?"

"Certainly, but both those questions are on my agenda for today. I try to solve all the little equivocal points that arise in my morning newspaper. I do it to keep my hand in."

When the three of us reached the city court, we found that the matter in hand was not a criminal suit or a civil suit, or indeed a suit of any kind. It was simply an investigation brought on by the uproar raised in the newspapers over what they called the "black market in babies."

Mrs. Dawson and her infant were before the bar and Andorus Enterprises were represented by their attorney, a Mr. Nock. Nobody had committed the slightest offense. There is no law against a mother giving away her child. But Mrs. Dawson's neighbors had read about the black market in babies, and three different ones had

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telephoned to police headquarters that Mrs. Dawson was about to give away her last baby; this investigation was the result.

As the three of us listened to the testimony, young Gebhardt got out his paper and pencil, but he had nothing to write. He grew more and more fidgety. Poggioli touched his arm.

"Very suggestive point. Why don't you put that down?"

Gebhardt concentrated. "What point?"

"Mrs. Dawson telling the whole neighborhood that she was going to give away her tenth baby."

"That's just woman-talk."

"Yes, but they don't usually talk about matters which reflect on themselves. Normally, Mrs. Dawson would have said nothing whatever about giving away her baby until it was all over, and then she would have explained it the best she could."

The reporter was a little surprised. "Why did she talk then?" he asked.

"I am sure I don't know. It's a point you should remember — something may arise later to explain it."

"I see. So it might." Mr. Gebhardt wrote the fact down on his yellow paper, and I could see him wondering what that particular little point could mean.

Since I have a mystery-story writer's slant on life, I usually pick out somebody to be the hero, somebody to be the villain, and so on. My villain in this instance was Mr. Nock, attorney for Andorus Enterprises. He looked the part. His manner and voice were oleaginous — exactly the way a questionable lawyer's would be. He reminded the court of all the good things Andorus Enterprises had done for the city. He pointed to Mrs. Dawson and said there was no mission more sacred to mankind than the care and nurture of the young. Of course, as a writer, I felt that any man who would use clichés like that must have a bad heart.

Mr. Nock continued that Andorus Enterprises had business connections not only throughout the United States but all over the world. It was no trouble for such a vast concern to make contact with wealthy but lonely couples, who would be glad to adopt a baby and rear it in comfort, even in luxury, as their own. Andorus Enterprises had done this for Mrs. Dawson. Andorus Enterprises had reached a helping hand down to their own scrubwoman and would lift her excess baby out of poverty into wealth and love and happiness. . . .

There was some sniffling in the crowded courtroom at this — from the women, of course.

Owing to Poggioli's previous comments on the cost of babies, this speech irked young Gebhardt very much, and finally the tall young man arose in the middle of Mr. Nock's oration and requested permission to ask a question.

There ensued a little byplay: Mr. Nock objected to any question; Gebhardt said that since the state was conducting the investigation and since

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he was a citizen of the state, he had the right to ask a question.

This was a new idea to the audience, who never thought of themselves as citizens of the state but as neutral third parties watching what the state was doing. The judge, a big impassive man, held that as a citizen of the state Gebhardt could ask his question. The reporter then expounded Poggioli's idea and asked if it were not true that a woman's tenth baby was almost no financial burden at all to its parents.

Mr. Nock answered this, saying, "It is clear to me, your Honor, that this young and inquisitive citizen of our great commonwealth has never had either a child or a wife, but I predict that by the time he has ten of one and one or two of the other, he won't have to come into the city court to find out whether or not a baby, no matter what its number may be, is v-e-r-y e-x-p-e-n-s-i-v-e."

An uproar of laughter broke out at this and young Mr. Gebhardt sat down with a hot face. In his embarrassment he looked in different directions over the courtroom and caught sight of another young man, somewhat older than himself, pushing his way around the wall and eventually kneeing his way between the benches to where we sat. When the newcomer got within whispershot, Gebhardt said, somewhat defensively, "What are you doing here, Jenkins?"

"I bumped into some stuff I thought it wouldn't hurt you to know," whispered the other reporter.

"Well, what is it?"

"It's this," said Jenkins impressively. "Dr. Majoffsky, who called on the yachting couple in the Del Mar penthouse, dropped by the First National Bank on his way back to his office."

Gebhardt started to say, "Well, what of . . ." Then he suddenly remembered Poggioli's remark about banks and banking hours, and he broke off suddenly. "How do you know he did?"

"I followed him in a taxi. I couldn't get into the penthouse, I couldn't get a phone call through, and I couldn't get a word out of the hotel management. So I followed the doctor. When I finally got into his office, he refused to talk. But I noticed something. He didn't carry a little vest-pocket case — the sort some city doctors carry; he had a bag, like an old-fashioned country doctor's. Then I decided to go back to the bank. There's a clerk I know very well. I went to him and said, 'Jim, did you see Dr. Majoffsky come in here a while ago?' He said he had. I said, 'Did he deposit money or take some out, or what did he do?' Jim said, 'You know, Jenkins, I can't tell you that.' I worked on him, and finally Jim said, 'Jenkins, why don't you guess how much Dr. Majoffsky deposited in our bank this morning?'

"I saw what he meant, so I said, 'This is for Majoffsky's medical services?'

"'I imagine so.'

"'Mm — mm . . . say, fifty bucks. These yacht owners are usually millionaires.'

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"My friend shook his head, and jerked his thumb upward.

" 'One hundred?' I said.

"My bank-clerk friend jerked his thumb 'way up.

"Well, I went up and up until finally I got too high. So I came down five hundred, and that was what it was. I had guessed it."

"Well, how much was it?" I asked.

Jenkins didn't look at me — he kept looking at Gebhardt as he answered the question.

"Forty-two thousand five hundred dollars!"

"For a morning's visit! I don't believe it!"

Jenkins made a slight gesture in my direction, and began listening to Mr. Nock's speech, which was still going on.

"As a matter of fact," said Poggioli, "I am sure Mr. Jenkins has discovered something more closely connected with this case than Dr. Majoffsky's fee — or he never would have come to this trial."

Jenkins seemed surprised at the psychologist's deduction, and Gebhardt immediately asked Poggioli what it was Jenkins had found out.

"I am sure Mr. Jenkins will tell us himself," said Poggioli.

"You don't know Jenkins. In the office they call him the clam."

"But under the present circumstances, with our information so disconnected and patchy, I certainly think it would be wise to pool what we know and see if we can't make something intelligible out of it."

With the two men whispering about him, as if he were a robot, Jenkins abandoned his secrecy. He said he wasn't sure that what he had found out had any connection with the case, but it popped into his head to look into the title of Hotel Del Mar, and to his surprise he found it belonged to Andorus Enterprises. What that meant he didn't know, but since Andorus figured in the baby-adoption case, he thought he would come down and see if he could pick up anything more.

This, of course, started all of us speculating on the possibilities. The ownership of the hotel proved nothing at all; still the exorbitant penthouse rate, the huge medical fee, and the complete seclusion of the occupants of the penthouse might possibly have some connection with the Andorus baby investigation.

I think I have a right to a certain pride when I say that I got the first glimmering of the situation. I broke out in a somewhat excited whisper. "Andorus is getting this baby for the couple in the hotel and that's the fee they are charging!"

Both reporters were against this theory.

"Why should the couple pay that much for a baby?" demanded Gebhardt.

"I don't know," I said, "but the papers are full of stories about baby black markets. Somebody seems to be paying for babies, and very stiff rates, too."

Poggioli nodded. "That is the inter-

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esting feature of this whole situation, gentlemen. Wealthy persons seem to be paying large amounts of money to be allowed to perform a charitable and humanitarian act. Right on the face of it, that's a contradiction. That's why it is so interesting."

"Look here," said Gebhardt, "we'll never have a better chance to find out than right now. Suppose I ask Mr. Nock a few more questions, and he'll have to answer."

I tried to stop him. "Gebhardt, that's no good. You might just as well try to put your finger on a drop of quicksilver as to ask questions of that lawyer."

But Gebhardt got to his feet and in a loud voice asked the court's permission to interrogate the witness. When Mr. Nock saw who it was he remarked, "By all means, Judge, allow the single, sole, and solitary citizen of our state to do his civic duty."

Again laughter arose in the courtroom. Gebhardt, however, stood his ground. "The question I want to ask is this," he proceeded. "There is a couple renting the penthouse of the Hotel Del Mar at a fabulous rate per day. They have also just paid an astronomical doctor's bill. What I want to know is — is that the couple to whom Mrs. Dawson's baby will be delivered by the Andorus company?"

A sensation went through the courtroom, but Mr. Nock seemed only blankly surprised. "What possible connection, your Honor, could there be between a hotel bill and a doctor's fee —"

Gebhardt interrupted. "I'm not asking what connection. All I want to know is whether or not the Hotel Del Mar couple is scheduled to get the Dawson baby."

For once in his life Mr. Nock seemed disconcerted. He said, "I am sorry I can't answer the young man's question."

"Does that mean you don't know the answer or that you will not give the answer?" pressed Gebhardt.

"May I explain a point in the philanthropy of Andorus Enterprises?" requested the attorney.

The judge tapped his desk. "The attorney has a right to state his corporation's position in this matter."

"Now listen to Nock crawl out of it," whispered Jenkins bitterly.

And sure enough, Mr. Nock did. He said that for reasons of humanitarianism he could not possibly divulge any information whatever concerning the adopters of the Dawson baby. Then he went on to point out that the great drawback to the adoption and successful rearing of adopted babies was publicity. When the child finally learned that it was an adopted child, that fact shook its feeling of security. Andorus Enterprises handled any children who came under its care in a completely different manner. Nobody would ever know the identity of the adopting parents — not even the mother of the child. Nor would the adopting parents know the identity of the mother. Andorus Enterprises arranged matters as humanly as possible so that the life of the child

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would be the normal, loved, and loving life that every child has a right to expect.

Now he, Nock, attorney for Andorus Enterprises, was neither admitting nor denying that the couple in the Del Mar penthouse were or were not the adopting parents, but he certainly trusted to the judgment and good will of the court that he would not be forced to destroy all the bulwarks of psychological safety for the child which his company had so painstakingly erected.

A great outburst of applause followed this explanation which the judge rapped down. He ruled that Mr. Nock would not be required to answer the interrogation.

The two reporters were disgusted. Poggioli touched Gebhardt's arm and whispered, "Make a note of that — it may be part of your story."

"You mean when he refused to answer?"

"I mean, his demurrer to answering was too smooth, too adroit not to be premeditated. He evidently was expecting somebody to ask him a question like that."

"Yes, I suppose he was. What of it?"

"It means the couple in the Del Mar penthouse really are paying thousands of dollars for the Dawson baby. Mr. Nock's ready-made defense proves it."

"That's it!" exclaimed Jenkins. "Plain as the nose on an elephant. I'll get back to the office and write a follow-up on the penthouse story."

In the courtroom the investigation was finished, and Mrs. Dawson was delivering her baby to Mr. Nock for the good of the child and the goodness of Andorus Enterprises, Inc.

When Jenkins had left, Gebhardt looked at Poggioli ruefully. "Now isn't that the devil? Here Jenkins drops in and gets a follow-up for his story, and I have absolutely nothing to write about —"

"You didn't observe anything else worth writing up?" asked Poggioli, with a certain expression on his face.

"Mm — mm . . . no-o . . ."

"You didn't notice how Mrs. Dawson handed the baby to Attorney Nock?"

"Why-y, she just handed it over, didn't she?"

"Exactly, just handed it over. Can you imagine a mother parting from her baby forever just handing the child over to a stranger, without kissing it and embracing it and weeping?"

Gebhardt looked blankly at the psychologist as we got out into the street. "Just what are you driving at, Professor Poggioli?"

"I mean that wasn't Mrs. Dawson's baby."

The reporter was bewildered. "Why, that seems impossible! She seemed such an honest woman. . . ."

"I'm not questioning Mrs. Dawson. She is honest — she is transparently honest. . . ."

"Of all the crazy . . . I've got to look into this. I can't take it on . . . you know . . . *just* reasoning. I've got to know. Good-bye and a thousand

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thanks for the tip!" And with that young Gebhardt got into his ancient car and set off for the Dawson home.

When we had hailed a taxicab and started for Acacia Street, I told Poggioli that the case interested me personally but not professionally. I explained that the situation was not sufficiently dramatic to make a good mystery story, and the solution was too simple. Then I added, a little regretfully, that if I had the knack I might doctor it up with a little imagination, but I simply didn't have the imagination.

Poggioli asked me what I thought the solution was. I said, obviously Andorus Enterprises was carrying out their policy of secrecy to the furthest possible extent. When they received a baby to place in a home, they hired a wet nurse for it in order to conceal completely the identity of its mother.

"Assuming that's true," agreed Poggioli, "how do you explain the couple in the Del Mar penthouse willing to pay thousands of dollars to receive an unknown and mysterious baby?"

"They are evidently wealthy people," I said, "and would expect to pay well if Andorus Enterprises took so many precautions to present them with a baby completely free from any undesirable family background."

"Why should Andorus Enterprises make its charges through doctors' bills, unreasonable rentals, and things like that?"

"That is merely an assumption," I pointed out. "But even if it's true, the adopting couple are perhaps millionaires who wish to aid in such good work and are glad to contribute considerable amounts to Andorus Enterprises."

"How can Andorus Enterprises be in a position to receive private charity with one hand when with the other it turns around and makes large and aggressive investments in stadiums and housing projects and submarine promenades?"

"I can't answer that," I said. "In fact, your questions are getting a little remote from the subject, aren't they, Poggioli?"

This pinked Poggioli. He answered acidly, "The trouble with ordinary minds is, they have trouble reaching obvious conclusions."

"You don't seem to know any more about this matter than I do," I said, in perfectly good humor.

"At least I know what *not* to believe," snapped the ex-college professor.

I let the matter pass. Poggioli once taught criminology in the Ohio State University, so naturally he loses his temper when he gets the worst of an argument.

We had just got out of our cab and I was putting my key to our front door when I heard a great racket coming down the street. The cats and dogs in Acacia Street have learned to scuttle out of the path of a speeding auto, and these occasional animals were now making their disappearances. I wondered what maniac could be driving at such a dangerous speed, when the

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uproar calmed down to a rattle, and out scrambled young Gebhardt. I looked at him with that natural dismay which an older man feels when a younger man pays him a second visit right on the heels of his first.

"I'm glad I got here in time!" cried the young reporter, tumbling out of his steaming vehicle and hurrying up to us.

"In time for what, Mr. Gebhardt?" I asked.

"To join you before you start for the Del Mar."

"Why do you think we are going to the Hotel Del Mar?"

"To investigate the baby Mr. Nock is taking there. It wasn't Mrs. Dawson's child after all."

"So what, Mr. Gebhardt?" I asked. "We already knew that."

He was quite taken aback. "Aren't you going over there to find out whom the stray baby belongs to?"

"Professor Poggioli is not a miracle man," I said, "or a mind reader. There is not one chance in a thousand that he could look at the adopting couple and tell whose baby it was."

Gebhardt said he would still like Poggioli to go with him to the Hotel Del Mar.

"But you can't see them," I objected. "Nobody can. That also is part of the Andorus benevolent secrecy."

"I've figured out a way for us to get into the penthouse," said Gebhardt, "so that we can interview both the millionaire and his wife to our hearts' content."

I asked him what he had in mind. He said we could put on overalls, get a box of tools, and enter the Hotel Del Mar as three plumbers.

I shook my head. "We can't do that, Gebhardt. Poggioli would never stoop to disguise himself as a plumber. In fact, as I told you before, he rarely goes out of his study to investigate a crime. He is a consultant, and he wouldn't dream of stooping to disguise himself —"

"I'll go with you, Gebhardt," interrupted my apartment mate.

I turned on him. "Look here, Poggioli, whose notes am I writing up anyway, a criminologist's or a gumshoe detective's?"

Poggioli is not a man without pride. He said to me, "If it wasn't for the extreme mystery of this case, and its duplication in many other parts of the United States, I wouldn't consider going with Mr. Gebhardt. . . ."

"I don't see much of a mystery in it," I retorted. "Some woman wants to get rid of her child. . . ."

"Not much of a mystery!" ejaculated Poggioli. "Never in history was there such an irrational demand for babies — a black market in babies. Imagine such a thing!"

Young Gebhardt was tremendously impressed. "Why do so many couples pay such fancy prices for babies?"

"That's the point I'm trying to solve. If I knew that I wouldn't need to go to the penthouse. So let's go."

On the way into town my two companions obtained three pairs of overalls and a kit of plumber's tools. At the entrance of the Hotel Del

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Mar we found a sizable crowd drawn both by the newspaper publicity and the city court investigation. They were evidently awaiting the arrival of Nock and the baby. Young Gebhardt did not stop here, but drove on around to the service entrance in the rear. Here we found a milk truck backed up to the curb, with two men delivering bottles and picking up empties. A guard stood at the back door. When we started in, the guard stopped us and said he was sorry but he couldn't admit us. Gebhardt got out a little book, thumbed through it, and said, "This is the Hotel Del Mar, isn't it?"

The guard said it was. "Then what does your manager mean, ordering us to come here and then not letting us in?" demanded the reporter.

The watchman became nervous. "Look here," he said, glancing into the hotel, "I think if you'll stick around for just a few minutes, I'll be able to let you in."

Naturally, we knew what that meant: the adopting couple were going to leave the hotel and every entrance would be blocked until they were gone. Gebhardt put down his kit and consulted his little book again. "Look here, if we can't get in, we're going to our next job." He began thumbing through the pages for our next appointment.

The guard became even more nervous. "Say, don't run off . . . couldn't you wait half an hour?"

"No, we won't wait half a minute."

We turned to go, when the guard stopped us. "Okay, you men go on in quietly — hurry, now!"

The basement of a big hotel is a maze. It is full of narrow concrete corridors leading past drab doors saying *No Admission.*

Gebhardt said, "We've got to find the freight elevator and get to the penthouse right away."

We were now hurrying along these endless basement corridors, and the probability of stumbling on a freight elevator was zero. I was as nervous as a cat, and the barb in my feeling was that I had no reason to be nervous. There was no real mystery —

Gebhardt cried out, "There's a bellhop. Hey, boy, where's the freight elevator?"

The blue uniform turned and pointed. "Go back the way you came — second turn to the left, third to the right, first to the right, then four doors further on . . ."

The three of us hurried away. We had followed directions as far as third turn to the right, when we heard the bellboy come running behind us. When he saw us down the long corridor, he hallooed, "I forgot to tell you, the freight elevator isn't running!"

All of us stopped. I was trembling and sweating without any reason whatever to tremble or sweat. Gebhardt called back, "Where's the passenger elevator? We hate to take these tools in the passenger elevator, but we've got to get upstairs."

"You can't take the passenger elevator — that's not running either."

"Is the electricity off?"

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"Oh, no — just everything's stopped . . . for a short while."

That drove Gebhardt almost frantic. "Well, where's the office? Where's the telephone system? There must be something somewhere that's working!"

The bellboy gave us detailed instructions how to reach the office, and we set off again, double-quick, and finally we reached some wide steps going up into the lobby. We ran up them and into the lobby. Through the front entrance we could see the crowd still besieging the hotel. Gebhardt breathed, "Thank heaven we're in time!" We made for the office, keeping our attention on the bank of passenger elevators across the lobby. Gebhardt got the attention of a clerk in his cage. "When can I go up to the penthouse to fix some plumbing?"

The clerk glanced at a clock. "Mm — mm, I imagine pretty soon. . . ."

"Elevators not running?"

"Not at this moment, but in a few . . ."

"How about me telephoning up there and finding out what I'm supposed to repair?"

"There's the house phone," said the clerk.

Gebhardt reached for it. Then he said to Poggioli, "You take it, you'll be able to tell a lot from their voices."

Poggioli got a connection with the penthouse. He jiggled his cradle two or three times. Finally he said, "Nobody answers."

Gebhardt grabbed Poggioli's arm. "Too late — they're gone!"

Poggioli started toward the basement again. "We're dumbbells," he snapped. "That milk truck wouldn't be delivering milk at this time of day! They were waiting for the couple and the baby, of course! They came down by the freight elevator!"

The three of us went helter-skelter down the basement steps and into the lower maze again. Fortunately, Gebhardt had a fine sense of direction. We raced to the service entrance and just as we saw the distant rectangle of light, a man and a woman carrying a baby, surrounded by bellboys, appeared and moved out to the milk truck. As we came running out, the woman screamed and hugged her baby closer in her arms.

The man said, "Darling, they're just some workmen!"

The woman said shakenly, "Yes . . . yes, I see they are."

Poggioli, who was fairly close now, called out in his quiet, authoritative professorial voice, "Madam, you and your husband are from Long Island, aren't you?"

"Y-yes," trembled the woman, "we are."

"On what day, Madam, was your baby stolen from you?" asked the psychologist.

"On Easter Sunday. . . ." Then she caught herself. "But who are you?"

Poggioli began asking more questions when the man hurried, "Come on, Mary, let's get out of here while we can!" And man, woman, and baby got into the truck and rumbled off.

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Gebhardt started running for his jalopy. "How in the world did you know they were from Long Island. . . ."

"Dialect, almost a patois, my boy. The people around New York, especially the wealthy, speak in a particular —"

"What a scoop this will be . . . kidnapers . . . how did you ever come to think of . . ."

"Why, it was so simple," said Poggioli, "this whole black market in babies is kidnaping. How can wealthy parents pay ransoms without the law knowing? Andorus Enterprises worked out a clever scheme. They have a child to be adopted. If the parents will pay a certain amount they can adopt a child. The fact that the child is already their own isn't mentioned by anyone. . . ."

Gebhardt was beside himself. "What a story! What a scoop!"

We were dashing away now toward the office of the *Tiamara Times*. Poggioli laid a hand on the car's rickety wheel. "Gebhardt," he called, "you mustn't go the *Times* office right now!"

Gebhardt glanced around. "Where should I go?"

"To the Federal Building."

The young reporter gave a snort. "Why should I. . . ."

"Because you are a citizen of this state . . . and of the United States."

"I don't get you."

"Listen, the baby black market is all over the country. This is one section of a vast criminal organization. You publish this and it warns all the others. They'll close up, go underground, maybe get clear away. Take this to the F.B.I. office in the Federal Building — the man in charge will guarantee you your scoop — but go there first!"

We parked at the curb and the reporter went inside the Federal Building. A policeman presently came along and gave me and Poggioli a ticket for improper parking. We continued sitting in the car, waiting. After a while Gebhardt came out. He appeared in a sort of daze. Poggioli said, "What's the matter?"

"N-nothing."

"You saw the F.B.I. head?"

"Yes, I saw him."

"Did he say he would take care of you when the story broke?"

"Oh, yes, yes, very appreciative. He said if I had published that story today it would have ruined everything. He'd been working on it for months. He said his men would move in on the Andorus bunch within twenty-four hours, and after that I should have the exclusive story."

"Why, that's fine for you," I cried. "Of course, there's no story in it for me, but it's O.K. for a newspaper. . . . By the way, do you know the name of the officer who is in charge of the F.B.I.?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

Gebhardt was still in a daze.

"Who is the F.B.I. head?" I repeated.

"Mr. Nock."

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EQMM's DETECTIVE DIRECTORY

edited by ROBERT P. MILLS

ALIAS BASIL WILLING *by HELEN MCCLOY* (RANDOM HOUSE, $2.50)	". . . a horrifying and really unusual pattern . . ." (LGO)	". . . ability to delve rather more deeply into character than the average mystery writer." (HT)
ACCIDENT BY DESIGN *by E. C. R. LORAC* (DOUBLEDAY, $2.50)	"Although . . . murderer is fairly easy to spot . . . background . . . character drawing . . . pace are thoroughly pleasant." (LGO)	". . . civilized, creditable, and enriched by a series of excellent, sharp characterizations." (HT)
THE CASE OF THE FIERY FINGERS *by ERLE STANLEY GARDNER* (MORROW, $2.50)	". . . two good court scenes, but the denouement seems unusually weak and disappointing." (LGO)	". . . there's no time wasted on either writing or characterization. But as pure puzzle, it's supreme." (HT)
TOO MANY BOTTLES *by ELIZABETH SANXAY HOLDING* (SIMON & SCHUSTER, $2.50)	". . . this short novel packs in enough suspense, emotion and sheer wallop for one twice its size." (LGO)	". . . literate charm, but . . . story this time is slimmer and more obvious than her others . . ." (HT)
PITY FOR PAMELA *by MARY FITT* (HARPER, $2.50)	". . . much nearer to the straight novel than the thriller . . . rewarding in a rather gloomy way." (LGO)	". . . element of mystery is almost negligible . . . chief quality is rather the atmosphere of impending tragedy." (HT)
REASONABLE DOUBT *by JOHN STEPHEN STRANGE* (CRIME CLUB, $2.50)	". . . quietly realistic . . . resolved . . . skilfully and fairly." (LGO)	". . . reasonable and civilized . . . a lively and soundly worked out murder mystery." (HT)
THE IVORY DAGGER *by PATRICIA WENTWORTH* (LIPPINCOTT, $2.50)	"As always with Wentworth books, this is romantic and pleasantly told." (LGO)	"Miss Silver . . . likable . . . but story fails rather disappointingly to be a genuine puzzle." (HT)
THE PROFESSOR KNITS A SHROUD *by WIRT VAN ARSDALE* (CRIME CLUB, $2.50)	". . . nicely plotted and modestly written, sounds like a promising first try." (LGO)	"A literate mystery, peopled by some moderately convincing characters." (HT)

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Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine rounds up the judgment of reviewers across the country. The key on the right gives sources.

Miss McCloy's usual ingenuity, expert characterization, polish. (RPM)	". . . strangely peculiar doings in another of Miss McCloy's civilized, Manhattan scene stories." (DBH)	
". . . solid story of sedate pace which never once loosens its grip on the reader's fascinated attention." (EB)	". . . slow-moving but steadily interesting; puzzle logically teasing in best British tradition." (KS)	
". . . if not the best, is decidedly one of the good Perry Mason cases." (AB)	"Most Perry Mason whodunits are difficult to put down . . . this one is more than ordinarily so." (AD)	
". . . one of the season's shortest but strongest shockers." (AB)	"Elizabeth Sanxay Holding returns with another of her unusual novels." (DBH)	
"This is an unusual, and commendable, mystery story." (RL)	"Interesting study . . . but suspense . . . interferes with validity and validity with suspense." (KS)	
"Interplay of logical event and believable persona builds to thorough suspense . . ." (KS)	"A fine trial story . . ." (DBH)	
". . . taste and skill . . . niceties of prose . . . sure handling of suspense." (EB)	"Maude Silver continues to be an excellent character study as well as a shrewd little detective." (DBH)	
". . . tragic, quite credible reason for a crime . . ." (NM)	"Deft suspense and delightful scholar-detective. Intelligent original." (KS)	

KEY TO REVIEW SOURCES

AB: *Anthony Boucher in The New York Times*

EB: *Elizabeth Bullock in The New York Times*

AD: *August Derleth in the Madison, Wisconsin, Capitol-Times*

DBH: *Dorothy B. Hughes in The Los Angeles Daily News*

RL: *Rex Lardner in The New York Times*

NM: *Nancie Matthews in The New York Times*

RPM: *Robert P. Mills*

LGO: *Lenore Glen Offord in The San Francisco Chronicle*

KS: *Kathleen Sproul in The Saturday Review of Literature*

HT: *Unsigned review in The New York Herald Tribune*

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STRANGLER'S SERENADE *by WILLIAM IRISH* (RINEHART, $2.50)	". . . suspense is fine, but the attempted humor and pathos aren't. Irish . . . more successful with . . . fantastic type of thriller." (LGO)	". . . strong and compelling suspense . . . clarity of detail . . . plot too slim . . . to place this among his best." (HT)
CURTAINS FOR THREE *by REX STOUT* (VIKING, $2.50)	"Nero Wolfe needs more room to expand, and yet these are enjoyable stories, swift-moving, clever, well-written." (AD)	"Mr. Stout, one of our ablest performers in the novelette length, has turned three more neat tricks . . ." (LGO)
FRAMED IN BLOOD *by BRETT HALLIDAY* (DODD, MEAD, $2.50)	"Michael Shayne . . . disentangled the lies, managed the girls and confounded the wicked as neatly as you would expect." (LGO)	". . . Halliday is experienced enough to be counted on for speed and a tight plot even in one of his minor yarns." (HT)
MURDER COMES HOME *by ANTHONY GILBERT* (RANDOM, $2.50)	". . . rollicking example of the straight detective story, skillfully done." (LGO)	"Cleverly plotted and eminently readable . . ." (HT)
TOO DANGEROUS TO BE FREE *by JAMES HADLEY CHASE* (DUELL, SLOAN & PEARCE, $2.50)	"Improvement over earlier Chase items: Perceptible." (LGO)	"Mr. Chase is well on his way to becoming the goriest writer in the detective story field." (HT)
MURDER IS THE PAY-OFF *by LESLIE FORD* (SCRIBNER'S, $2.50)	". . . admirable clarity and . . . usual slick style." (LGO)	Smoothly convincing though crime emphasis is slight. (RPM)
EXIT FOR A DAME *by RICHARD ELLINGTON* (MORROW, $2.50)	". . . neat yarn, full of action and good reasons why the impossible can sometimes happen." (LGO)	"An intriguing situation — and except for a couple of red herrings, which aren't entirely cricket — a sound plot." (HT)
DIPLOMATIC CORPSE *by PHOEBE ATWOOD TAYLOR* (LITTLE, BROWN, $2.50)	". . . since Asey Mayo is in it, mystery and characters alike are gloriously goofy." (LGO)	"A slim plot which hinges on insufficient motivation." (HT)

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Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine rounds up the judgment of reviewers across the country. The key on the right gives sources.

". . . free-wheeling nightmare of high-pressure terrorism . . . a few inconsistencies, but . . . suspense . . . almost unbearable." (JnS)	Headlong, breathless, and gripping as always. (RPM)	
". . . exactly enough in each of Wolfe's eccentricities, Archie Goodwin's sharp prose, and Mr. Stout's ingenious plotting." (AB)	"No stitches dropped — but wool thin." (KS)	
"What might have been a good plot is . . . snafued by Shayne's sparring with police and brandy bottle." (KS)	"Mike Shayne . . . with the usual accoutrements . . . glamor gals, uncooperative cops, cruel gangsters . . ." (DBH)	
". . . solid, witty, complex-yet-fast-moving . . ." (EB)	"Few outdo Gilbert in interest, plot, and weird but credible characters." (KS)	
". . . identity of the villain will surprise no one, but if you like to read about violence, murder and inanity, they are . . . here." (NM)	". . . familiar roster . . . but tops in snap and suspense." (KS)	
"Plot seems side issue . . . but . . . writing civilized. Pleasant enough." (KS)	"Miss Ford, as always, writes in polished style and with fine construction." (DBH)	
". . . direct style in action and description . . . Excellent realistic fantasy." (KS)	"For the believe-what-I-see boys, all is explained; others will run a mile from Chinese wands." (DBH)	
". . . it all simmers down to much-ado-about-nothing." (EB)	"Confusion — not suspense." (KS)	

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Evelyn Waugh's work ranges from serious biographies of painters and poets to "hectic pieces of savage satire" — with "grim and purposeful" travel books sandwiched in between his "major" efforts. Today Mr. Waugh is fast becoming one of England's and America's most widely read authors, and it is true that few people who have been exposed to DECLINE AND FALL, VILE BODIES, BRIDESHEAD REVISITED, *and* THE LOVED ONE *have recovered from the original impact. The author himself is an interesting personality: cynical and sophisticated in manner, innocent and cherubic in appearance. He once listed his chief recreations as eating, drinking, drawing, and traveling, and his chief aversions as love, conversation, the stage, writing, and Wales — all of which may be taken with a pound of salt.*

Even more interesting, however, are Evelyn Waugh's work habits: for every three or four hours of actual writing, he spends twelve to eighteen hours thinking about what to write. "You know," he has said, "you go out for a walk, get a thought, come back, alter a sentence. The thing grows, goes along. About on the average each sentence is written at least twice. Just push the words around and change them, you know . . ."

MR. LOVEDAY'S LITTLE OUTING

by EVELYN WAUGH

"You will not find your father greatly changed," remarked Lady Moping, as the car turned into the gates of the County Asylum.

"Will he be wearing a uniform?" asked Angela.

"No, dear, of course not. He is receiving the very best attention."

It was Angela's first visit and it was being made at her own suggestion.

Ten years had passed since the showery day in late summer when Lord Moping had been taken away; a day of confused but bitter memories for her; the day of Lady Moping's annual garden party, always bitter, confused that day by the caprice of the weather which, remaining clear and brilliant with promise until the arrival of the first guests, had suddenly blackened into a squall. There had been a scuttle for cover; the marquee had capsized; a frantic carrying of cushions and chairs; a tablecloth lofted to the boughs of the monkey-puzzler, fluttering in the rain; a bright period and the cautious emergence of guests onto the soggy lawns; another squall.

It had been an abominable afternoon, culminating at about six o'clock in her father's attempted suicide.

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Lord Moping habitually threatened suicide on the occasion of the garden party; that year he had been found black in the face, hanging by his braces in the orangery; some neighbors, who were sheltering there from the rain, set him on his feet again, and before dinner a van had called for him. Since then Lady Moping had paid seasonal calls at the asylum and returned in time for tea, rather reticent of her experience.

Many of her neighbors were inclined to be critical of Lord Moping's accommodation. He was not, of course, an ordinary inmate. He lived in a separate wing of the asylum, specially devoted to the segregation of wealthier lunatics. These were given every consideration which their foibles permitted. They might choose their own clothes (many indulged in the liveliest fancies), smoke the most expensive brands of cigars and, on the anniversaries of their certification, entertain any other inmates for whom they had an attachment, at private dinner parties.

The fact remained, however, that it was far from being the most expensive kind of institution; the uncompromising address, *COUNTY HOME FOR MENTAL DEFECTIVES*, stamped across the notepaper, worked on the uniforms of their attendants, painted, even, upon a prominent hoarding at the main entrance, suggested the lowest associations. From time to time, with less or more tact, her friends attempted to bring to Lady Moping's notice particulars of seaside nursing homes, of "qualified practitioners with large private grounds suitable for the charge of nervous or difficult cases," but she accepted them lightly; when her son came of age he might make any changes that he thought fit; meanwhile she felt no inclination to relax her economical regime; her husband had betrayed her basely on the one day in the year when she looked for loyal support, and was far better off than he deserved. . . .

A few lonely figures in great-coats were shuffling and loping about the park.

"Those are the lower-class lunatics," observed Lady Moping. "There is a very nice little flower garden for people like your father. I sent them some cuttings last year."

They drove past the blank, yellow-brick façade to the doctor's private entrance and were received by him in the "visitors' room," set aside for interviews of this kind. The window was protected on the inside by bars and wire netting; there was no fireplace; when Angela nervously attempted to move her chair farther from the radiator, she found that it was screwed to the floor.

"Lord Moping is quite ready to see you," said the doctor.

"How is he?"

"Oh, very well, very well indeed, I'm glad to say. He had rather a nasty cold some time ago, but apart from that his condition is excellent. He spends a lot of his time in writing."

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They heard a shuffling, skipping sound approaching along the flagged passage. Outside the door a high peevish voice, which Angela recognized as her father's, said: "I haven't the time, I tell you. Let them come back later."

A gentler tone, with a slight rural burr, replied, "Now come along. It is a purely formal audience. You need stay no longer than you like."

Then the door was pushed open (it had no lock or fastening) and Lord Moping came into the room. He was attended by an elderly little man with full white hair and an expression of great kindness.

"That is Mr. Loveday who acts as Lord Moping's attendant."

"Secretary," said Lord Moping. He moved with a jogging gait and shook hands with his wife.

"This is Angela. You remember Angela, don't you?"

"No, I can't say that I do. What does she want?"

"We just came to see you."

"Well, you have come at an exceedingly inconvenient time. I am very busy. Have you typed out that letter to the Pope yet, Loveday?"

"No, my lord. If you remember, you asked me to look up the figures about the Newfoundland fisheries first?"

"So I did. Well, it is fortunate, as I think the whole letter will have to be redrafted. A great deal of new information has come to light since luncheon. A great deal . . . You see, my dear, I am fully occupied." He turned his restless, quizzical eyes upon Angela. "I suppose you have come about the Danube. Well, you must come again later. Tell them it will be all right, quite all right, but I have not had time to give my full attention to it. Tell them that."

"Very well, Papa."

"Anyway," said Lord Moping rather petulantly, "it is a matter of secondary importance. There is the Elbe and the Amazon and the Tigris to be dealt with first, eh, Loveday? . . . *Danube*, indeed. Nasty little river. I'd only call it a stream myself. Well, can't stop, nice of you to come. I would do more for you if I could, but you see how I'm fixed. Write to me about it. That's it. *Put it in black and white.*"

And with that he left the room.

"You see," said the doctor, "he is in excellent condition. He is putting on weight, eating and sleeping excellently. In fact, the whole tone of his system is above reproach."

The door opened again and Loveday returned.

"Forgive my coming back, sir, but I was afraid that the young lady might be upset at his Lordship's not knowing her. You mustn't mind him, miss. Next time he'll be very pleased to see you. It's only today he's put out on account of being behind with his work. You see, sir, all this week I've been helping in the library and I haven't been able to get all his Lordship's reports typed out. And he's got muddled with his card index. That's all it is. He doesn't mean any harm."

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"What a nice man," said Angela, when Loveday had gone back to his charge.

"Yes," said the doctor. "I don't know what we should do without old Loveday. Everybody loves him, staff and patients alike."

"I remember him well. It's a great comfort to know that you are able to get such good attendants," said Lady Moping; "people who don't know say such foolish things about asylums."

"Oh, but Loveday isn't an attendant," said the doctor.

"You don't mean he's cuckoo, too?" said Angela.

"He is an *inmate*. It is rather an interesting case. He has been here for thirty-five years."

"But I've never seen anyone saner," said Angela.

"He certainly has that air," said the doctor, "and in the last twenty years we have treated him as such. He is the life and soul of the place. Of course he is not one of the private patients, but we allow him to mix freely with them. He plays billiards excellently, does conjuring tricks at the concert, mends their gramophones, valets them, helps them in their crossword puzzles and various — er — hobbies. We allow them to give him small tips for services rendered, and he must by now have amassed quite a little fortune. He has a way with even the most troublesome of them. An invaluable man."

"Yes, but why is he here?"

"Well, it is rather sad. When he was a very young man he killed somebody — a young woman quite unknown to him, whom he knocked off her bicycle and then throttled. He gave himself up immediately afterwards and has been here ever since."

"But surely he is perfectly safe now. Why is he not let out?"

"Well, I suppose if it was to anyone's interest, he would be. He has no relatives except a step-sister who lives in Plymouth. She used to visit him at one time, but she hasn't been for years now. He's perfectly happy here and I can assure you *we* aren't going to take the first steps in turning him out. He's far too useful to us."

"But it doesn't seem fair."

"Look at your father," said the doctor. "He'd be quite lost without Loveday to act as his secretary."

"It doesn't seem fair."

Angela left the asylum, oppressed by a sense of injustice. Her mother was unsympathetic.

"Think of being locked up in a loony bin all one's life."

"He attempted to hang himself in the orangery," replied Lady Moping, "*in front of the Chester-Martins.*"

"I don't mean Papa. I mean Mr. Loveday."

"I don't think I know him."

"Yes, the loony they have put to look after Papa."

"Your father's secretary. A very decent sort of man, I thought, and eminently suited to his work."

Angela left the question for the time, but she returned to it again

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at luncheon on the following day.

"Mums, what does one have to do to get people out of the bin?"

"The bin? Good gracious, child, I hope that you do not anticipate your father's return *here*."

"No, no. Mr. Loveday."

"Angela, you seem to me to be totally bemused. I see it was a mistake to take you with me on our little visit yesterday."

After luncheon Angela disappeared to the library and was soon immersed in the lunacy laws as represented in the encyclopedia.

She did not re-open the subject with her mother, but a fortnight later, when there was a question of taking some pheasants over to her father for his eleventh Certification Party, she showed an unusual willingness to run over with them. Her mother noticed nothing suspicious.

Angela drove her small car to the asylum, and after delivering the game, asked for Mr. Loveday. He was busy at the time making a crown for one of his companions who expected hourly to be anointed Emperor of Brazil, but he left his work and enjoyed several minutes' conversation with her. They spoke about her father's health and spirits. After a time Angela remarked, "Don't you ever want to get away?"

Mr. Loveday looked at her with his gentle, blue-gray eyes. "I've got very well used to the life, miss. I'm fond of the poor people here, and I think that several of them are quite fond of me."

"But don't you ever think of being free again?"

"Oh, yes, miss, I think of it — almost all the time I think of it."

"What would you do if you got out? There must be *something* you would sooner do than stay here."

The old man fidgeted uneasily. "Well, miss, it sounds ungrateful, but I can't deny I should welcome a little outing, once, before I get too old to enjoy it. I expect we all have our secret ambitions, and there *is* one thing I often wish I could do. You mustn't ask me what. . . . It wouldn't take long. But I do feel that if I had done it, just for a day, an afternoon even, then I would die quiet. I could settle down again easier, and devote myself to the poor crazed people here with a better heart. Yes, I do feel that."

There were tears in Angela's eyes that afternoon as she drove away. "He *shall* have his little outing, bless him," she said.

From that day onwards for many weeks Angela had a new purpose in life. She moved about the ordinary routine of her home with an abstracted air and an unfamiliar, reserved courtesy which greatly disconcerted Lady Moping.

She read a great deal in the library, she cross-examined any guests who had pretensions to legal or medical knowledge, she showed extreme goodwill to old Sir Roderick Lane-Foscote, their Member. The words "alienist," "barrister" or "government official"

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now had for her the glamour that formerly surrounded film actors and professional wrestlers. She was a woman with a cause, and before the end of the hunting season she had triumphed. Mr. Loveday achieved his liberty.

The doctor at the asylum showed reluctance but no real opposition. Sir Roderick wrote to the Home Office. The necessary papers were signed, and at last the day came when Mr. Loveday took leave of the home where he had spent such long and useful years.

His departure was marked by some ceremony. Angela and Sir Roderick Lane-Foscote sat with the doctors on the stage of the gymnasium. Below them were assembled everyone in the institution who was thought to be stable enough to endure the excitement.

Lord Moping, with a few suitable expressions of regret, presented Mr. Loveday on behalf of the wealthier lunatics with a gold cigarette case; those who supposed themselves to be emperors showered him with decorations and titles of honor. The attendants gave him a silver watch and many of the non-paying inmates were in tears on the day of the presentation.

The doctor made the main speech of the afternoon. "Remember," he remarked, "that you leave behind you nothing but our warmest good wishes. You are bound to us by ties that none will forget. Time will only deepen our sense of debt to you. If at any time in the future you should grow tired of your life in the world, there will always be a welcome for you here."

A dozen or so variously afflicted lunatics hopped and skipped after him down the drive until the iron gates opened and Mr. Loveday stepped into his freedom. His small trunk had already gone to the station; he elected to walk. He had been reticent about his plans, but he was well provided with money, and the general impression was that he would go to London and enjoy himself a little before visiting his step-sister in Plymouth.

It was to the surprise of all that he returned within two hours of his liberation. He was smiling whimsically, a gentle smile of reminiscence.

"I have come back," he informed the doctor. "I think that now I shall be here for good."

"But, Loveday, what a short holiday. I'm afraid that you have hardly enjoyed yourself at all."

"Oh, yes, sir, thank you, sir, I've enjoyed myself *very much*. I'd been promising myself one little treat, all these years. It was short, sir, but most enjoyable. Now I shall be able to settle down again to my work here without any regrets."

Half a mile up the road from the asylum gates, they later discovered an abandoned bicycle. It was a lady's machine of some antiquity. Quite near it in the ditch lay the strangled body of a young woman, who, riding home to her tea, had chanced to overtake Mr. Loveday, as he strode along, musing on his opportunities.

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WINNER OF A THIRD PRIZE: Q. PATRICK

Before we tell you anything about Q. Patrick's "All the Way to the Moon" (which, we hasten to assure you, is not *a story of fantasy or science fiction), we want to call your attention to a fact which, with each passing year, becomes more and more impressive: namely, that Q. Patrick is the only detective-story writer who has won a prize in every single one of EQMM's annual contests. "All the Way to the Moon" is Q. Patrick's sixth consecutive prize-winning story — extraordinary proof of the Patrick consistency of performance and constancy of quality. May we continue to say the same next year . . . and* ad infinitum . . .

Loyal readers of the Q. Patrick short stories are aware of the authors' preoccupation in the past with tales in which unpleasant people go about killing other unpleasant people. Q. Patrick has always taken an almost fiendish delight in concocting stories about neurotics who murder other neurotics. So, it was inevitable that sooner or later Q. Patrick would reverse their field. They asked themselves: How near can we get to finding a situation in which a rather nice person kills another rather nice person?

That was the creative premise of "All the Way to the Moon," and by the time Q. Patrick had finished, by the time the story had taken final shape, they had evolved not only a rather nice murderer and a rather nice victim, but also, as you will see, a rather nice Nemesis . . .

ALL THE WAY TO THE MOON

by Q. PATRICK

UNEXPECTEDLY, as John Flint carried his wife's breakfast tray into the bedroom, It came back. Came back was not really the right phrase, because now It was never completely out of his mind. But the spring sunshine, which stole through the half-closed drapes, must have had some quality of Mexican sunshine, for suddenly he was in Mexico City again, breathing the exhilarating mountain air and feeling the wonder of its strangeness.

"Had a good night, dear?" With neat automatism he balanced the tray on his wife's knees and hardly hearing Amy's patient, invalid's response, murmured: "Well, mind you call Dr. Jepson if there's any trouble."

He crossed to the frilly vanity table

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and opening the little jewel box, brought it over to his wife's bed. Since he had performed this ritual every morning for five years, he knew exactly what she was doing — although he himself was three thousand miles away. First, the diamond-chip bracelet was slipped onto the thin left wrist; then the clasp of the real pearl necklace was snapped beneath the heavy bun of dark hair, streaked with gray. Then came the two solitaire-diamond earrings. Amy had taken to wearing this jewelry, inherited from an aunt, ever since the first heart attack which had made her virtually bedridden. John Flint had never really wondered why — he was not a curious man; perhaps it was her gesture of rebellion against the drabness of invalidism. After her bad nights, she asked him to help with the earrings; but she didn't today.

"Well, goodbye, dear." He kissed the dry forehead which reminded him dimly of paper. "Tell Mrs. O'Roylan I'll be back for dinner."

He was always home for dinner, but those were always his parting words. In the kitchen, bright with shelf paper and flowered oilcloth, he prepared his own breakfast. The daily woman didn't come in until nine thirty. After stacking the dishes, he moved out into the suburban street lined with neat little homes just like his own, and walked the three blocks to the trolley which would take him to the center of town.

As he jolted through the tame prettiness of the city spring, with children, housewives, and other businessmen seated around him, It was still with him. At times these curious spells puzzled him, although they had been coming with increasing frequency during the last two years. He had been to Mexico City for a month's vacation a long time ago and he had been fascinated by its exotic beauty. But later, through the years of a dull, not unhappy marriage, he had hardly given it a thought. Why should it have returned to him now? — so transformed, so wonderful and shining like a mirage of Paradise.

He knew that he should bring himself down to earth. There was a lot to be done to perfect his new sales-promotion scheme which had already won an unofficial nod of approval from the head office. As the town's sole representative for Bonifoot Shoes, John was a conscientious employee. But his painstaking efforts to concentrate on shoes only brought him visions of huaraches, and then of bare, dust-stained Mexican feet padding over distant sidewalks — the feet of Indian peons from the hills, carrying baskets of rare flowers, strange fruit, and exotic pottery to the markets. . . .

When he reached the one-room office where he conducted his business modestly, without the aid of a secretary, John Flint still felt the odd sensation of not belonging here. In these periods he wasn't a man of forty-three dutifully wedded to a bedridden wife and a humdrum job in a banal industrial city. He was — what? A boy —

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that was it — a boy, free as the mountain wind, in a world where Popocatepetl's great hump loomed against a translucent sky.

It was the arrival in the office of Harry Shipley which pulled John back to reality. He hadn't seen Harry for a long time — not since Harry had worked for a while as a salesman for Bonifoot Shoes. But he looked exactly the same — the same flashy sports-coat; the same violent, hand-painted tie; the same false camaraderie; all designed to counteract the essential insignificance of his face and personality.

"Hi, there, John, you old horse, you. Long time no see."

"Hello, Harry. Sit down. What can I do for you?"

Harry Shipley sat down opposite the desk where the mail, which John had picked up from under the door, still lay unopened. The moment Harry started to speak, John sensed a touch. And he was correct. *Kind of a tough period, Johnny. Just the right opening's hard to find.* There were marital difficulties too. Harry had never got on with his wife. Now finally he had persuaded her to agree to a divorce. He was desperately eager to get to Reno and then start a new life with a new girl — a fresh start far away — say, on the Coast. He had a little saved up, but not enough. If John, as an old pal, could see his way clear to a loan of five hundred dollars —

It wasn't difficult to plead temporarily straitened circumstances himself and get rid of Harry Shipley. But the look of bleak disappointment on the other man's face remained to haunt John. Secretly he had been impressed by Harry — daring to attempt something so bold as a divorce and a new life. For a moment, as an image of Amy's emaciated figure passed across his mind, he thought It was going to come back. . . .

Deliberately, he started to open his mail.

There were two letters from the head office. One finally okayed his promotion scheme, which involved a street check and the distribution of coupons for free shoes. The second letter was from the Personnel Manager. As John read it, his heart began to thump violently.

> Dear John:
> Old Pemberton, our Mexico City representative, is going to retire shortly. He finds the altitude too tough on his ticker. Gummet tells me that you are familiar with Mexico and that you have applied for a South of the Border position. So, if you feel like a change of scenery, here's your chance. There's no hurry about this, but let me know as soon as you can.
> Yours for bigger Bonifoot sales,
> Sam

John Flint found himself shivering. This couldn't be true. Life didn't do this for you. Of course, several years ago he had told Gummet, the District Manager, that he would like a South American assignment if one ever came up. And yet . . . and yet . . . Suddenly It was upon him again, as if It had known all along and had been preparing him for this moment. And now It was much more

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glorious than ever before. For this was real. Those bustling, colorful streets three thousand miles away were no longer a mirage. They were his future — a true, concrete future which nothing could snatch away.

He read the letter again and, as he did so, his glance settled on the sentence: *The altitude's too tough on his ticker.* A chill began to invade him and with it rushed the image of Amy lying, bejeweled, in her dim bedroom; Amy nursing her high blood pressure and her faltering heart. Somehow in all his golden dreams he had never thought of Amy. With a sense of impending disaster he called Dr. Jepson and listened in silence to his clipped, relentless reply.

"Take Amy to Mexico City? My dear man, a week in that altitude and she'd be dead. Out of the question. Quite out of the question. It would be murder."

John put the receiver back. He sat for a long time looking at the letter. . . .

Late that night John Flint lay awake in his bed. Only a few feet away, his wife's thin figure was stretched, invisible, in the darkness. He had not told her about the Mexican offer. What was the point? It would only make her feel guilty, make her feel more of a drag on him than she felt already. If only she could be cured! He had a little nest egg put away. And then there were her jewels. Wasn't there some specialist — New York? Even London? But he knew this was only idle dreaming. Dr. Jepson had made that abundantly clear many times. There was nothing that could be done for her condition.

Against his will he started to think about Harry Shipley. Harry was divorcing his wife, beginning a new life. Divorce . . . But how could he divorce Amy? She had no one in the world but him. And it wasn't her fault that she was sick. What had she ever done to him except try to be as little trouble as possible?

"John." Her whispering voice came from the other bed. "Are you awake?"

"Yes, dear."

"I hate to ask . . . but could you please get me a glass of milk?"

John scrambled out of bed as he had done a thousand times before and turned on the bedside lamp. Amy blinked up at him. She had forgotten to take off the earrings. They glittered with incongruous splendor beneath her untidy hair. Because John had loved her and knew that it was his duty to go on loving her, he had not for years really thought about her or even looked at her. But now he had been jolted from his anesthetizing habit-pattern and he saw with merciless clarity the rough skin under the defeated eyes, the sharp angles of her cheekbones, the withering neck. She was suddenly a stranger, something infinitely removed from the solemn, fresh young girl he had married. . . .

So it's this, he thought, almost wonderingly, that stands between me and everything that matters. It's this

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pointless woman who is chaining me forever to this prim little house, this suburb, this awful town.

He went down to the pretty kitchen. As he was pouring milk into a glass, the thought came, sudden, shocking, unlike any other thought he had ever had.

If she would die, he thought . . . *If she would only die* . . .

In his mind, faint guitar music was trailing from behind pale pink adobe walls. What was that song? Oh, yes, he remembered:

Ya yo me voy
Al puerte donde se alla . . .

It had come back.

Next morning John Flint awoke with the thought: What if burglars broke in some afternoon when Amy was alone in the house and killed her for her jewels? It was not impossible. Mrs. O'Roylan was a confirmed gossip. Everyone in the neighborhood must know about Amy's jewels and her odd habit of wearing them in bed. All that day, as he put the last touches on his Bonifoot promotion scheme, he kept the Personnel Manager's letter unanswered on his desk and the thought of burglars in his mind. Now that he had invented them, it seemed somehow certain that they would come. That evening he returned to his house with a fearful expectancy, half dread, half joy, of what he might find. But Amy greeted him with a smile from her bed: it had been one of her good days.

John could never have told exactly when he decided to make the burglars real. But the next day in his office he found himself working out a Plan with the same impersonal efficiency which he used to tackle one of Bonifoot's problems.

The burglars would come on Thursday afternoon, of course, because Thursday was Mrs. O'Roylan's afternoon off and Amy was invariably alone. In his mind's eye he saw burly men, with handkerchiefs tied over their noses and mouths, creeping up the stairs to the bedroom. Amy was lying there in the semi-darkness, behind closed drapes, the jewels gleaming at her throat and ears. She would see the intruders, of course, so they would have to be quick. A pillow pressed on her face — that would stop her cries for help and work swiftly, considering her heart condition, with a minimum of discomfort to her. He could picture the men, after the deed, fumbling the jewels from the limp body and stealing furtively away.

By this time the burglars were so lifelike that it was all he could do to remember that they would, in fact, merely be himself.

And what of him? At the time of the crime, of course, he would have to be far away, in some definite place, where there would be unimpeachable witnesses to his presence.

It seemed obvious that his Bonifoot promotion scheme should somehow provide the alibi. The scheme was a simple publicity stunt which the company had never tried before; but

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they had been impressed with John's idea and, if his first tests proved successful, they were considering adopting it throughout the nation. Every day for a week, John was going to stand at a busy midtown intersection, taking note of all the wearers of Bonifoot models who passed him on the sidewalk. Every tenth individual who walked by wearing Bonifoot Shoes would be stopped, asked his or her name and address, and then given a coupon entitling the lucky person to a free pair of Bonifoot Shoes at any of the local stores. As a final twist, every hundredth Bonifoot patron who passed by would receive a coupon for five pairs of shoes.

Yes, if the burglars were to kill Amy next Thursday afternoon, John would be standing with his notebook at the corner of 15th and Market.

But how? That was the kernel of the problem. How could he be at 15th and Market and at his home, three miles away, simultaneously?

It was the thought of Harry Shipley that clinched it. Harry's blank, nondescript face with its typical salesman's grin came into his mind — and suddenly John Flint saw his way.

He called Harry on the phone.

"Hi, Harry. Still interested in that loan?"

"Johnny, old horse!" Harry's voice was thick with eagerness. "I knew it. I knew old Johnny-boy wouldn't let me down."

"Fine. How about coming over to the office right now. I've got a little proposition."

While he was waiting for Harry, John Flint surveyed his own reflection in the mirror behind his desk. He had always disliked his face. It was so depressingly ordinary: a smooth, uneccentric face which could have been worn by any of countless thousands of small businessmen or salesmen; a face, surely, that gave no hint of his own personal uniqueness. But now, for the first time, the colorlessness of the reflection pleased him. He practiced a jovial salesman's grin. Yes, that vacuous face might be anyone's face — Harry Shipley's, for example.

He called the railroad station and was told that the Western Express to Reno arrived daily from New York at 6:47 P.M. and left at 6:49 P.M.

When Harry Shipley burst exuberantly into the office, he was wearing gray flannel trousers, and a brand-new, flashy sports jacket, beige with large orange squares. On his necktie, two hand-painted cockers struggled cutely for a bone against a tan background.

"Hi, Harry, how soon are you headed for Reno?"

"Just as soon as I can put my hand on those five hundred smackers."

"How about holding off until next Thursday?"

"Gee, Johnny, you really mean. . . ?"

"This week I'm up to my neck. Got a promotion project that'll keep me on the streets all day. I need someone to hold down the office. Just to answer the telephone and make a couple of trade calls. That's all it

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amounts to. If you'll do that for me, I'll write you a check right now. You can knock off a hundred bucks for salary and pay me back the rest when you're good and ready."

As John scribbled the check, Harry's gratitude was almost oppressive. Sure, he'd start work tomorrow, sure, he'd do anything for old Johnny. And, boy, come 6:49 P.M. next Thursday this town wasn't going to see him for dust.

When finally Harry got up to leave with the check in his pocket, John Flint glanced from his own sober gray lounge suit to the dazzling sports jacket.

"That's a good-looking jacket, Harry. New, isn't it?"

"Sure. Just picked it up the other day at Hunt & Hunt." Harry fingered the necktie proudly. "Picked this up too. Sharp, isn't it?"

"Very sharp. Wear them around the office, Harry. I like a snappy dresser. Gives people a good impression."

After Harry had left, John went out to Hunt & Hunt. A sportscoat, exactly like Harry's, was on the rack. He bought it. He also bought a tan necktie with gamboling cockers, and a pair of gray flannel trousers. He took the box back to the office and hid it in a closet.

That evening, as he jolted home on the trolley, the lumbering vehicle seemed suddenly to be crammed with Indians. Bunches of Easter lilies, almost sickeningly sweet, seemed to be jostling against his face. *Bajando*. The air was full of excitable Mexican voices. *Bajando* . . .

It had come back.

Next morning, at nine o'clock sharp, Harry Shipley, in his gaudy sports jacket, all smiles and cooperation, showed up at the office. John explained the routine set-up to him and then sent him off with some new Bonifoot samples to a large department store. Once he had gone, John Flint produced the box from the closet and quite calmly, as if his entire life wasn't changing, slipped into the sports jacket and flannel trousers and knotted the cocker necktie beneath his collar. Putting his own suit back in the box, he returned the box to the closet and studied his reflection in the mirror. His features, actually, were not at all like Harry's. But essential insipidity gave them a kinship. A hearty smile and, for all any casual observer would notice, that might be Harry Shipley beaming back at him from the glass.

With his notebook and his coupons, John Flint took the trolley to 15th and Market. There he spent the day, conscientiously taking down footwear details, giving out the coupons, noting the names and addresses of the recipients. This was his scheme and there was no reason not to make a good job of it. But The Other Thing was always there, excitingly in the back of his mind. It made him take pains to attract the mild attention of the cop on the block and of the cripple who sold newspapers outside the bank

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building. A casual greeting, a smile, the beige and orange sportscoat — they were enough to make him a distinct if unimportant feature of the corner.

During the day he telephoned his office several times to keep a check on any business that had come up. At five o'clock exactly he called for the last time and told Harry he could go home.

Back in the empty office, he typed up his material for the day and changed back into his gray business suit and sober tie, returning his borrowed plumage almost lovingly to the box in the closet.

He repeated this procedure for four days and during those days he behaved at home exactly as he had always behaved. He found it surprisingly easy. Something had happened, something which had made Amy completely unreal to him. Every morning he brought her breakfast tray, every morning he went through the ritual with the jewel box. Every night he slept in the bed next to her. But she wasn't there — especially at night when the Personnel Manager's still unanswered letter glowed in his mind and then slowly, luxuriously dissolved into a panorama of broad foreign avenues, brilliant with sunshine, lovelier, more desirable than the streets of any earthly city. . . .

The fifth day was Thursday. Before John left the house, he unbolted the kitchen door. Later, when Harry, still in the snappy sports jacket, hurried flushed and apologetic into the office a few minutes after nine, John greeted him with a friendly smile.

"Well, Harry, all packed?"

"I'll say I am. Bags all checked at the depot and my ticket bought. Johnny, you old horse thief, if you knew what you'd done for me!"

"Think nothing of it. Look, Harry, something's come up from the head office. I've got to work on it all day and this is the last day of my street survey. Think you could take over the survey for me? You know the Bonifoot models by now."

"Sure, Johnny, glad to do it."

It did not take long to brief Harry on the survey. John explained how to make notes of each Bonifoot model that passed, how to handle the free coupons.

"There should be a hundredth coming up today. That person gets the coupon for five pairs of shoes. And always keep a careful time note. That's important. Jot down the exact minute you give out a coupon. I'm using that in my report. And, Harry, no sales talks, no personal conversations with the coupon winners. I want to keep this whole thing dignified."

"Fine, Johnny. And until five, you say? That's a cinch. Plenty of time to bring my notes back here before I get that train. Boy, that train! Will I be singing hallelujah when I finally see the last of this old town!"

After he had sent Harry off to 15th and Market, John Flint resisted the temptation to write to the Personnel Manager and accept the Mexico City offer. He found an old copy of *Brush*

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Up On Your Spanish in his desk drawer and carried it out with him to lunch. At two thirty he took the trolley to his home. It was practically empty and, in any case, his ordinary appearance and drab suit were a perfect camouflage against attracting attention.

Now that the moment of climax was approaching, he didn't exactly feel calm. It was a stronger emotion than that. He felt exalted, infinitely capable, as if there was nothing in the world he couldn't carry off. Some kids were playing ball on a corner lot. It was all he could do to keep himself from jumping off the trolley and running to join them. If he hit that ball, it would travel all the way to the moon. That's it — that's where he was going — all the way to the moon. . . .

He had to be careful that no one should see him entering the house at this uncharacteristic hour. He dropped off the trolley several stops before his regular one and, choosing a deserted sidestreet, slipped around to the back door of the house. He turned the knob and entered.

It was so long since he had been home on a weekday afternoon that the quiet kitchen seemed oddly unfamiliar. From upstairs, he could hear symphony music playing on Amy's radio. That was odd too. He disliked classical music and he didn't know that Amy ever listened to it. Quietly — although there was no need to be quiet — he went up the stairs and through the open door into the somber-draped twilight of the bedroom.

Almost before he saw Amy herself, he saw the jewels. They made little glittering areas in the shadowy monotone. Then Amy noticed him and her voice came warm with pleasure, young, the way he remembered it.

"Why, John, what a lovely surprise!"

He crossed to the little alley between the two beds. She was smiling, and in the vague light she looked fragile and girlish. But he had traveled too far into himself to feel any pity for her.

"Oh, John, that music!" She made a move as if to turn off the radio. "I know you hate it. But lately when I've been lying here alone . . ."

"That's all right, dear. Let me fix your pillows."

"Thank you, John."

As he slipped one of the pillows from beneath her head, she patted his sleeve shyly.

"It's wonderful that you've managed a free afternoon on a Thursday, John. Thursdays, without Mrs. O'Roylan, always seem to drag so. But then I shan't complain, shall I? I won't spoil this lovely treat. I . . ."

He brought the pillow violently down against her face. The impact of the unexpected blow knocked her head back onto the other pillow. Caught between the two smothering surfaces, she struggled for a little while. Then her body went limp.

John let his pillow drop to the floor. Automatically, as he had acted a

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thousand times before, he took off the pearl necklace, the diamond earrings, and the diamond-chip bracelet. Only this time, instead of replacing them in the jewel box, he put them in his pocket. He stood for a moment looking at the dimly discerned body which had no reality for him. Then he removed from her dangling wrist the little watch he had given her on their tenth anniversary. He peered at its dial. It said exactly twenty minutes past three. He threw it on the floor repeatedly until it stopped, so that the precise time could be established from it later. Tossing it on the floor by the bed, he tugged drawers open and simulated a hasty search for other valuables. Then, leaving the radio still playing, he walked out.

With a crowbar from the cellar he forced the bolt on the back door to show where the burglars had broken in. Putting the crowbar back where he had found it, he slipped out through the yard and picked up the trolley four blocks away.

He had rather thought, now that he had killed Amy, that It would come back. But no. While he rode into town, he was still John Flint who had just murdered his wife. He did not feel any emotion. But he was still alert, capable, reviewing what he had done, searching painstakingly for flaws. He could find none. All that remained was to get rid of the jewels, to wait in the office for Harry to bring back his notes from the survey, and then to make sure Harry caught that train.

He had already decided the fate of the jewels. He got off the trolley at the stop before the bridge and carefully choosing his moment as he walked across, dropped them into the grimy river. He saw them go with no pang. The jewels had no part in his future. It hadn't been jewels that he had wanted from Amy.

At exactly five thirty Harry barged into the office in a state of great excitement and self-satisfaction.

"Here they are, old boy — all the notes. Exactly the way you said. Gave out coupons. Didn't even whistle at a blonde. The real dignified gentleman — that was me."

He hovered while John studied the penciled notes. They couldn't have been more desirable. That afternoon, between two and five, two regular coupons had been handed out and at precisely three fifteen, one special five-shoe coupon had been given to a woman. Her name and address, like that of the other recipients, were neatly marked down with the exact time.

"Fine, Harry. Thanks a lot."

"You thanking me? That's for laughs. Johnny, old boy, you've saved a life today — that's what you've done."

Harry's effusive thanks went on for so long that John began to worry about the train. But that was all right too. At ten to six Harry went exuberantly off to the station.

As John studied the notes, he began to feel a deep craftsman's satisfaction. He had pulled it off. He had done

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what he had set out to do. He had managed to be in two places, three miles away from each other, at one and the same time.

While Amy was being smothered by the burglars in that dimly-lit bedroom, he had been at 15th and Market giving a five-shoe coupon to . . . what was the woman's name? He consulted Harry's notes again. Miss Carmen Gonzales, 1374 Pine Street.

Carmen Gonzales. That name, redolent of distant sunshine and soft Mexican laughter, was surely a favorable omen. The two words rang prettily in his ears, as he carefully typed up Harry's notes, added them to the complete file of the survey, and burned the papers which bore Harry's handwriting.

Everything was set now. He changed into the violent sports outfit and packing his gray suit in the box, wrapped it and tucked it under his arm.

At home, he let himself in by the front door as usual. He went straight upstairs. Hardly glancing at the thing on the bed, he unpacked his suit and hung it neatly in the closet. He left the radio still playing and took the empty cardboard box down to the cellar. Then he went to the telephone in the hall. His voice sounded stunned and incredulous even to himself as he called the police.

It was then that a sudden, unrehearsed detail occurred to him. Mrs. Roseway next door had often been kind to Amy; she had brought her doughnuts when she baked; and a couple of times she had sat with her at night when John had had to entertain out-of-town salesmen. He ran now to his neighbor's house, beating on the front door with his fists. When Mrs. Roseway, plump and amiable, appeared, he gasped:

"Amy! Quick! Something terrible has happened to Amy!"

Mrs. Roseway was with him when the police arrived. And while he hunched in apparent apathy in the living room, Mrs. Roseway took them upstairs. Through the long confused interval that followed, when the house seemed to be full of a regiment of plainsclothesmen and police officers, Mrs. Roseway was constantly at John's side, encouraging and comforting him. It was Mrs. Roseway who confirmed the fact that Amy had always worn her jewels in bed and that the jewels were missing. And after John had given his own faltering statement, she plunged to the defense of his as yet unchallenged character. John Flint, she said, was a model citizen, the most affectionate, the most admirable husband on the block.

The Police Inspector, like everyone else, treated her with respect and, partly for her sake perhaps, was as tender with John as a godfather. When the investigation was finally over, it was obvious that John would have to go with the police to the precinct headquarters. But the Inspector patted his shoulder.

"This is a clear case of breaking and entering. And we can prove you were miles away at the time. But we'd bet-

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ter drop by your office, pick up the records of that survey, and check with those people you say you've got on the list. That'll establish it once and for all. And you'll feel better when we get that alibi on record for you."

"Of course," said John. "Thanks. I'm ready to go whenever you are."

They drove to the office. John gave the survey file to the Inspector. At headquarters, policemen were sent to pick up the three people whose names and addresses appeared on the afternoon list and also, at John's suggestion, the cop on the corner and the crippled newsvendor.

The cop and the newsvendor were the first to be brought in. They both glanced at John, sitting by the Inspector's desk.

"Yeah," said the cop, "he's been around the block all week doing a survey or something."

"That's right," said the newsvendor. "Seen him every day."

The first of the coupon recipients was an elderly woman with the slightly harassed air of a solid citizen unused to police stations. On the Inspector's instructions, she studied John carefully and then said:

"Yes, that's the man who gave me the coupon. I wouldn't forget that coat. This — this doesn't mean the coupon's no good, does it? I haven't used it yet but I was planning . . ."

"No, lady. The coupon's fine." The Inspector consulted John's typewritten list. "It says here he gave you the coupon at two ten. That right?"

"Yes, that would have been it. I had just been around to the five-and-dime store and . . ."

"Okay, lady, that'll be all. Thank you."

The second coupon winner was a young man with a jaunty air. He was even more satisfactory than the woman.

"Sure. I remember that tie. Pretty keen. Figured I might buy one just like it. Keen."

All that was needed now was Carmen Gonzales. Once she arrived and established the key moment of the alibi, this would be over. John Flint, leaning back in the wooden chair, began to feel a strange affection for the stuffy, drab atmosphere of the police station. He had never been in one before and he hadn't expected it to be like this. It was almost cosy. But only his surface was reacting to it. Underneath, holding itself patiently in check, but waiting, waiting to surge up again, was It.

And as he sat there, John Flint began to realize that something immensely important was happening inside him. All his life, up till now, he had been haunted by a nagging sense of failure. Even It, if he had ever dared to admit it, had been only a daydream, a compensation for the dreariness of reality, a shimmering mirage of what might have been but never would be. He had never really believed he would get to Mexico. No, even after he had started to plan Amy's death, he had never believed that It could actually be achieved.

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But he had done it. Miraculously, by his own unaided efforts, he had forced life to go his way. He, John Flint, had done that, calmly, efficiently, without a faltering step. Who else among his circle of friends and acquaintances could have pulled off so magnificent an enterprise. Harry? The idea was laughable. He felt a growing wonder at himself and a new, burnished pride.

It was half an hour before Miss Carmen Gonzales was brought in by the officer. She was young, dark, pretty as an exotic tropical flower, and at the sight of her It was suddenly released in John and exaltation rose through him. *Señorita.* That was the word that came with her, and magically, once again, the broad paseos, the softly padding Indians, the little boys scurrying around vending lottery tickets — all vibrant in his mind, beckoning . . .

Come, come . . . come to us . . . we are all yours at last. . . .

John was hardly paying any attention to what was happening now, but he saw the girl glance quickly at him and then turn nervously to the Inspector. She was obviously ill at ease. That touched him. You couldn't expect an exquisite little girl like that to be calm in a police station.

The Inspector said: "You are Miss Carmen Gonzales of 1374 Pine Street?"

"Yes, sir. But what's the matter? The officer wouldn't tell me. Why have you brought me here? What have I done?"

Carmen Gonzales was drifting into It now. Hand in hand, John and this lovely girl were walking down leaf-fringed boulevards — to the bull fights, perhaps. . . .

"Now, there's nothing to be frightened of, Miss," said the Inspector paternally. "We just want you to answer a few questions. This afternoon at the corner of 15th and Market Street did you receive a coupon entitling you to five free pairs of Bonifoot Shoes?"

A flush started to spread under the girl's dusky cheeks. "I haven't used it yet. I can give it back."

"That won't be necessary, Miss."

Suddenly the girl spun to John and clutched his arm. "Oh, Mr. Flint — you must be Mr. Flint, aren't you? — I'm sorry. You've been so wonderful to Harry. He's told me about the loan and everything. I knew we shouldn't have done it." Her pretty pleading face was close to his. "I told Harry it was mean, petty, almost like stealing. But he thought you wouldn't mind. He said that the five-pairs coupon had to go to someone — so why shouldn't I be the hundredth person to walk by? You see, having to get the trousseau and everything to join Harry in Reno . . . Five pairs of shoes, it did seem such a wonderful chance. But we shouldn't have done it. Oh, Mr. Flint, you're kind. I know you're kind. Don't make a charge against Harry; don't have him arrested."

What was happening inside John Flint was terrible. It was as if an atomic bomb had plunged from the

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air without a sound of warning, raging into his dream city, cracking the tall buildings, splitting the boulevards, smothering the sunlight in a miasma of dust.

"Harry?" barked the Inspector. "Who's this Harry?"

The girl turned. "He's my fiancé. And Mr. Flint has been wonderful to him, lending him money for the divorce, giving him a job as his assistant when he didn't really need one. Just to be kind. This afternoon he sent Harry on the street survey and — well, Harry shouldn't have done it, but he called me up and told me if I joined him right away on 15th and Market, I would be able to get the free coupon. He . . ."

Carmen Gonzales spun back to John Flint, leaning toward him, pathetically eager to justify herself, to convince him that, even though she and Harry had done a shoddy act, they were genuinely sorry.

"Please, Mr. Flint." Awkwardly she fumbled the coupon from her pocketbook and held it out to him. "Take it. I couldn't ever use it. Five pairs of shoes! Why, that'd be over fifty dollars! I can't imagine how we could have been so — so completely despicable."

Her warm young smile was like the grin of Disaster stalking through the ruins.

"And, Mr. Flint, I only hope that one day *you'll* be in trouble. Then Harry and I will really be able to prove our gratitude."

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